Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_KV-733-624

For Max – April, 1948
(Raw material
for his third)

A.

THE LIFE OF THOMAS HOLCROFT

"He has indeed gone before the world, as he says."

This Edition is limited
to 700 copies.

Thomas Holcroft
from the frontispiece to the first edition of
the "Memoirs," 1816

THE LIFE
OF
THOMAS HOLCROFT

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF
CONTINUED TO THE TIME OF HIS DEATH
FROM HIS DIARY NOTES & OTHER PAPERS
BY WILLIAM HAZLITT
AND NOW NEWLY EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY
ELBRIDGE COLBY

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. I

LONDON
CONSTABLE & COMPANY LTD
1925

Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME ONE

PAGE

Editor's Preface vii

Introduction xv

Principal Events in Holcroft's Life . . lvi

Advertisement to the First Edition (1816) . lxi

THE LIFE OF THOMAS HOLCROFT

BOOK I: Autobiographical Chapters . 1

BOOK II: Chapters on Early Occupations 111

BOOK III: Chapters on Literary Activities 219

ILLUSTRATIONS IN VOLUME ONE

THOMAS HOLCROFT . . . . . *Frontispiece*

From the portrait engraved by Blood after Opie, and used as frontispiece to the First Edition of *The Memoirs of Thomas Holcroft* (1816).

FACE PAGE

"MEMOIRS OF THE LATE THOMAS HOLCROFT" . lviii

Facsimile of the title-page of Vol. I of the First Edition.

"JOHNNY AND MARY" 198

Facsimile of words and music. From *The Vocal Enchantress* (1783).

"FOLLIES OF A DAY" 274

Facsimile of the title-page of the First Edition (1785), with the autograph of John Genest.

CHARLES MATHEWS AS "GOLDFINCH" IN "THE ROAD TO RUIN" 294

From the portrait engraved by J. Hopwood, jnr., after de Wilde, and published in *The New English Drama*, edited by W. H. Oxberry, 1819.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE editor of this volume undertook nearly ten years ago the preparation of a Bibliography of Thomas Holcroft, which has since been published by the New York Public Library. As by-products of that study, he has published articles on "Thomas Holcroft: Radical," in *The Mid-West Quarterly*, on "Thomas Holcroft: Translator of Plays," in *The Philological Quarterly*, on "Strolling Players" in the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, on "Financial Accounts of Holcroft Plays" in *Notes and Queries* (1924), on "A Defence of Spouting Clubs" in *The Nation* (New York), on "Thomas Holcroft: Man of Letters," in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, and on "Thomas Holcroft and the Gordon Riots" in *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*. In the course of those investigations he discovered new data and contradictions of previously accepted conceptions, which, it is believed, are of sufficient importance to warrant the preparation of this new edition. By correcting erroneous dates, by filling in portions insufficiently full, by providing full names in most of the cases where merely initials are used, the editor believes that he has provided a more practical edition than any that has hitherto

appeared. Hazlitt worked very close to his subject, in time and circumstances. The Waller-Glover edition is fully annotated with explanatory remarks, but with little or no attempt to bridge the lacunæ or to supplement the narrative where the modern reader might want clearer statements.

The major portions of new material appearing in this edition ought perhaps to be indicated. For the preliminary period of Holcroft's life, extending from 1745 to 1777, the emendations consist chiefly in explanatory foot-notes and minor corrections, except for certain new side-lights on his activities as a strolling player and as a member of a "spouting club." For the acting period, extending from 1777 to 1781, the new material includes correct dates of publication, indication in some detail of his work as an actor, fuller characterization of his products as a song writer and as a journalist.

For the central period, from 1781 to 1794, the additions are numerous. It has been possible to show how and why he quitted the boards and took up the pen, to indicate how very voluminous a translator he was, to separate and distinguish his trips to Paris, and to give a fuller picture of his activities as a Radical. It has been possible almost to double the amount of significant material which Hazlitt gathered. Where he depended almost exclusively upon Holcroft's own *Narrative of Facts*, the present editor has sought in the pages of history and historical discussions and theses, in the unpublished official records of the investigators for the Privy Council,

in the newspapers and personal letters and memoirs of the time. The original chapter, as written by Hazlitt, has therefore been supplemented with insertions and foot-notes, but in such a way as to keep the narrative clear, adding to without damaging the initial story told by Hazlitt.

In spite of the apparent virtues of a procedure which would leave Hazlitt's work substantially intact, verified, or emended only by brief foot-notes, such a drastic expansion of the chapter on Holcroft's Radical activities is perfectly proper. This was the most important chapter in his life. By his doings at this time will his name eventually be remembered, not by his mediocre plays and tiresome novels. The subject has to do with the international relations of France and England; it is concerned with the personal policies of British statesmen like Pitt and Dundas; it touches upon the topic of popular psychology in time of war. Were it even merely an incident in Holcroft's life, it would still be important. It was really an event which epitomized the character of the man, his sensitive pride and his strong opinions which, to use the words of a contemporary, were "sometimes so strange and sometimes so good." It is the most significant phase of his life. About it all the incidents of his career may reasonably be grouped. Yet to these facts Hazlitt devoted only a short chapter. To augment that chapter to twice its original size is believed to be, not so much a criticism of the ability or resources or judgment of Hazlitt as a

tribute to Holcroft himself. Just such a complete presentation Holcroft himself would surely have preferred. Standing in the presence of the judge at the Old Bailey, believing there to be "no true grandeur but that of mind" and risking his liberty and his life upon the outcome of his acts, he declared to quibbling advocate, meticulous judge, and gaping populace: "I come to surrender myself to this court, and my country, to be put upon my trial, that, if I am guilty, the whole extent of my guilt may become notorious: and, if innocent, that the rectitude of my principles and conduct may be no less public."

The declining period of Holcroft's life, from 1794 to 1809, now appears to have been inadequately and inexpertly narrated in the form in which Hazlitt left it. It is uselessly interrupted to permit the insertion, out of its chronological order, of an extract from Holcroft's diary. The personal facts are pieced together here and there. The comments on Holcroft's writings are similarly introduced without respect to literary type or biographical connotation. It did not seem advisable to discard Hazlitt's work altogether, and to re-write that material entirely, letting the work of a modern stand in the place of Hazlitt's bungling conclusion. For Hazlitt is still Hazlitt, and, though one may assail, he should not discard completely the writings of a man whose works have been admitted into the almost sacred canon of English literature. It did not seem advisable to attempt to supplement this portion of the *Memoirs* by inserting in their proper order

additional facts recently brought to light, for the simple and sufficient reason that Hazlitt has no proper order. He scampers up and down the chronology of those years with such disregard for calendars that confusion would be the only result. The latter part of the *Memoirs* has, therefore, been left approximately as it stood, except for minor emendations, a few additions, and explanatory foot-notes.

It is only proper to point out, in this general connection, that Hazlitt's conception of Holcroft's last years, or at least the impression which he gives of them, is absolutely erroneous. The new view of their unsatisfactory character has been developed primarily by bibliographical research, by the discovery of unfavourable critiques of published works, by the listing of new ventures which were unsuccessful, by references to forced sales of his personal library, and to the pitiable condition of his family after his death. He did not live through the normal declining old age, supported in body by the fruits of his prior endeavours and in mind by the estimation of the fellow citizens who had applauded his works. He declined alike in body and mind and finances and public estimation. These facts have already been made plain in the Introduction. Every reader of the following pages should realize that the modern view is not the view of Hazlitt.

The "Letters to and from the author," which appeared at the end of the edition of 1816, have been placed in their proper positions in the text, next to the events with which they are connected.

One only (that from Madame de Genlis) has been omitted; for it is chiefly of bibliographical interest and has already been employed and quoted in full by the present editor in his discussion of the bibliographical item to which it refers.

Notes to this edition are designated and distinguished from one another as follows: those signed "*H*" are by Holcroft himself and are few in number; those signed "*Hazlitt*" are by William Hazlitt, from the 1816 edition; those taken from the reprint of the *Memoirs* appearing in the second volume of *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt, edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover*, 1902, are indicated by "*W.-G.*"; and those by the present editor are unsigned.

Annotations, evidently taken from the original manuscript, are indicated by the name of the "London Library," where an annotated copy of the first (1816) edition is now kept. These annotations are mostly of names to replace the initials and dashes which appear in the diary portion of the book. In addition to the data secured from this London Library copy, the present editor has been able to fill in many other spaces and also to corroborate many of the ascriptions in the London Library copy. A great many of these names were independently established before the present editor consulted the London Library copy, so the corroboration is often the other way. The accuracy of the London Library copy in these details in all instances where it could be checked establishes its general reliability to such a degree that it has been trusted in many

instances where it could not be checked at all. All of these brief alterations have been made in this edition in the form of complete changes in the original text, showing the new material in italics. For the benefit of American scholars it may be remarked that the editor's personal copy of the 1816 edition, containing transcriptions from this London Library copy as well as much other material, has been presented by him to the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University.

Aside from these names and foot-notes, the few other insertions in the original text are of two kinds: (1) Letters by Holcroft which were in the 1816 edition grouped at the end of the third volume; and (2) material taken from writings of Holcroft, printed and unprinted.

All of these insertions are enclosed in brackets [ ] and are printed in smaller type than the original text preceding and following. With the exception of these insertions and the transposition of some paragraphs from chapter iv to chapter iii, Book IV, and the italicized entries, the text [of Hazlitt] has not been tampered with.

All other additions are in the form of foot-notes.

Punctuations and spellings are retained as in the 1816 edition. It was Hazlitt's usual practice not to put quotation marks around the titles of books or to italicize titles; but in the fifth chapter of the fourth book where he did use quotation marks, the readings have been left as in the original. Passages inserted out of contemporary books and letters are made to conform to Hazlitt's usual practice in this particular.

The *Memoirs* are incomplete. Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, in his "Memoirs of William Hazlitt" (1 : 179), says of the work: "The 'Life Everlasting' was finished this year (1810) so far as it was ever finished (for the fourth volume is still in MS.)." He is quoted in the Waller-Glover, 1902 edition, as writing: "These *Memoirs* were never, in spite of all the lapse of time, completely printed; only three volumes out of four were printed." And the Waller-Glover editors remark: "Every endeavour to find this fourth has failed." To these remarks the present editor adds his own confession of failure at discovery, even after long, extensive, and intensive search.

INTRODUCTION

TOM MOORE once said that he rated the autobiographies of Holcroft and of Gifford "the two most interesting specimens in the language." A hundred years have passed since the remark was made by Moore, and the relative merits of the present volume may be less. Yet its absolute and intrinsic value is still very great. As a novelist, Holcroft was undistinguished. As a playwright, he was commonplace, in spite of undoubted successes, in spite of the distinction attaching to his name by his piracy of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, in spite of his fortuitous translation of Pixerecourt's *Coelina* into the first English melodrama, and in spite of the repute attained by his comedy of *The Road to Ruin*. As a radical revolutionary, he believed more in talk than in action, and his chief claim to political fame rests on the fact that he was indicted for high treason in 1794 along with Thomas Hardy, Horne Tooke, and John Thelwall, whose trials were the sensation of the period. As a translator of Continental literature, he was able, discriminating, successful, voluminous, and characteristic of the reciprocal literary influences of his time. Mary Russell Mitford has said, substantially: "If ever one

happens to pick up a translation of a foreign book of that time and find therein the zest and savor of original writing, he shall find upon the title-page the name of Thomas Holcroft." Yet the truest characterization that has ever been penned about him is found in the words of that liberal contributor to the London *Nation*, Mr. H. N. Brailsford, who remarked in 1915 :

> One sees him still on the day when Mr. Dundas signed a warrant for his arrest as a traitor to the realm. Rumour brought him the news. He disdained to wait for the arrival of the officers, but boldly stalked into the Chief Justice's Court, demanding to be put upon his trial that "the rectitude of his principles and conduct might be made public." That was a man, and no Stoic ever despaired of the Republic as sternly as Holcroft trusted his own Virtue. His principles were not exactly original. . . . We prefer to think of Holcroft as the man who incarnated the doctrine of Human Perfectibility and the Powers of the Mind. Others may have made that doctrine, but it made him. He grew by it from ostler to metaphysician. He challenged the gallows in its name. It sits on him with the grace of a garment fashioned to his powerful frame. It was the expression of the original impetus, the *élan vital* which formed him and shaped him. His career was to be a great individuality ; and it hardly troubles us to discover that his plays were second rate and his novels hardly even that. The true monument to such a man is not his Opera Omnia, but his biography.

This biography, part of which came from his own memory, shows us a lower middle class

Englishman, born in London, the son of a shoemaker, and the grandson of a cooper. We see his father fail in business and go peddling about the country, taking his family along to aid in the roadside selling. "There was a single instance in which I travelled on foot thirty miles in one day." Then the young Thomas became a stable-boy at Newmarket, and later an apprentice shoemaker. When he was twenty-five years old, he determined to become an actor, went to Dublin with Macklin, and then for many years served as a strolling player throughout England with a variety of companies, in days when strolling players really strolled. He practically educated himself, learned something practical in vocal and instrumental music, mastered his own and some foreign languages and literatures, and after much arduous hack-work achieved some success as novelist, journalist, poet, critic, translator, adaptor, and editor. Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin and Thomas Paine were among his friends. The principles of liberty and freedom were his principles. Social morality was his constant ideal. The theory of human perfectibility found in him a most ardent advocate and a striking example. Mind was all-important, said Holcroft, mind could conquer anything. And his own power of will and constant application raised him from obscurity into the limelight. By it a humble shoemaker was able to create the character of Goldfinch in *The Road to Ruin*, whose famous phrase resounded in all the drawing-rooms of London in his own

time, and drew applause and laughter from theatre audiences on various revivals for over a hundred years. Like a hurricane of impetuous argument he pushed into the literary circles of his time, convincing Ritson, stirring Godwin, filling Blake with enthusiasm, pushing *The Rights of Man* through the press, inspiring Southey and Lovell, impressing Jeffrey, providing material for the punster, Lamb, influencing Crabb Robinson, and attempting to argue the deist, Coleridge, into atheism. Even on his deathbed, after a period of "unrelenting persecution," which his political theories had brought upon him, and which had temporarily driven him from his native shore, and even foisted scandalous inuendoes upon the motives for his residence abroad, he tried to write and continue to teach the doctrine of perfectibility, the powers of the human mind, and that social morality which he called Virtue. These *Memoirs*, which he tried to dictate from his final sickbed while death was fast approaching to cut short his work, are his final gift to posterity. Written "to excite an emulation in the breasts of youthful readers," they truly form an astonishing document, rich in anecdote, alive with human interest and honest self-analysis, and touched with the most unpopular and advanced theories of that generation.

Turning from mechanical to intellectual pursuits, and filling very minor parts in Drury Lane stage productions, he "took pen in hand" and sought literary celebrity. After ranging about from whimsical songs in the Scotch manner to

serious elegies in the versification of Pope, from inferior plays to political articles and pamphlets, he produced *Duplicity* in 1781, of which *The English Review* remarked :

> There has not been a comedy within the memory of man, in which the *dénouement* has been so artfully concealed, and the suspense and anxiety of the audience concerning the fate of the principal character so thoroughly excited, as in *Duplicity*. . . . The play is a very powerful effort of genius and the circumstances attending its author are remarkable . . . one of those who, self-educated, rise by the efforts of perseverance, industry, and superior faculties, from ignorance and obscurity into estimation.

The enthusiasm of the critic may have warped his judgment, for even though the play seem to us now somewhat above the average of that time, the confidence of the producer in it was not very great. Both *The English Review* and *The European Magazine* carried extended comments on the attitude of Mr. Harris in advertising another play "over its head," and not allowing it "to take its run." The *Memoirs* give further data on the subject; and yet they also indicate that the acceptance and production of this piece caused a change in the life of the author. "Slight as the success of *Duplicity* might be," says the Boaden biography of Mrs. Inchbald, corroborating the *Memoirs* on this point, "it inspired Holcroft with the resolution to quit the boards himself, or appear on them only by deputy." He and

Elizabeth Inchbald, who acted the part of Melissa in this play, had this in common: to display her beauty by walking in the pantomimes seemed to the lady as far beneath the dignity of a writer of successful plays, as playing the parts of ridiculous old men, or filling in as a foolish recruit in *The Camp*, or as a plebeian in *Julius Cæsar*, seemed below Holcroft's. Henceforth authorship was to be his sole occupation, except for a temporary appearance in *Figaro*, a short time later, to meet a temporary emergency created by the indisposition of the actor cast for that part.

The play itself is characteristic of Holcroft's work. It deals with the manners of the time, with that polite and popular gambling which was the predominant feature of the period. It is a picture of a type of London life, drawn with the avid strokes of an earnest-minded social reformer. He was eager to write such plays and books as might do good in the world. To him, the stage was "a very efficient school of morality." Years later, in *The Theatrical Recorder*, he remarked: "Nothing can be said more to a nation's praise than that it should delight in moral exhibitions, and it may be doubted whether any single drama has better promoted morality than the tragedy of George Barnwell." And also, he spoke in the same periodical of a French comedy of the sentimental sort: "It would send both parents and children from the theatre, instructed in some most important duties, and delighted with the mode in which instruction is conveyed.

When comedies of this class shall meet the applause they deserve, the powers of the stage over the morals of mankind shall then be justly appreciated."

The years from 1782 to 1794 comprise the most important period of Holcroft's literary life, when he was between the ages of thirty-seven and forty-nine. They include the production of the play, *Seduction*, in 1787, a piece frankly written to preach morality, of which *The Monthly Review* remarked :

> This claim in modern times, seems to be novel. . . . The dramatists of our own day are chiefly anxious to entertain, to surprise, and to divert ; and if, at any rate, they attain their object, all ends are answered ; the managers of our theatres repeat their performances ; the newspapers tell us that they are written and acted *with discrimination ;* and the author, in the warmth of fancy, wears the laurel wreath. . . . In the midst of this general decline of true tastes and judgment, Mr. Holcroft comes forward with a manly spirit and with sentiments that do him honor. . . . We are pleased to find an author who has made a just estimate of his art.

These years, from 1782 to 1794, also include a continuation of his interests in versifying and in music. He took a tenor part in the Handel celebration in Westminster Abbey in 1784 ; and in the same year that *Seduction* appeared, he contributed to *The Universal Magazine* the following bit of verse, here quoted for the new light it throws upon one facet of Holcroft's

mind, upon his ability to pay pretty compliments neatly turned :

FARREN AND FANCY

As Fancy was whisking and whirling about,
From visits to auctions, from opera to rout,
She call'd out to John—" Bid 'em drive to the play :
Keep my carriage in waiting, I'm sure I shan't stay."
The caution was needless ; aware of her whims,
He leaves the step down, his wax flambeau new trims ;
Nor puts on his hat, for he sagely foretold
The odds were he would not have time to catch cold :
John knew her too well to suppose he should long
Have to linger and wait—yet for once he was wrong.
Five minutes are fled ! All amaz'd at her stay,
John shuts the coach-door, and five more slip away !
" Why, what can it mean ? " Half an hour is soon gone!
Quite fond of his lady, fear seizes poor John :
He throws down his flambeau, he darts thro' each door,
And entering, hears the whole house in a roar ;
Bestowing, with ecstasy, praise without pause,
In vollies of laughter, and peals of applause.
" My lady ! my lady ! " John shouts out aloud—
" She's fainting, or frighten'd, or lost in this crowd ! "
And, still, as he called, Lady Fancy he nam'd :
When soon a full chorus of voices exclaim'd—
(Disturbed by his bawling, and half in a rage)
" Look, Lout, can't you see her ; she's now on the stage.
Are Farren and Fancy not one and the same ?
We know of no diff'rence, except in the name."

These same twelve years from 1782 to 1794 likewise include the publication of his two best novels, *Anna St. Ives* (1792) and *Hugh Trevor*

(1794); the production of his three best plays, *The School for Arrogance* (1791), *The Road to Ruin* (1791), and *The Deserted Daughter* (1794); a host of successful translations, including among the most notable those of Lavater's *Physiognomy* (1789), Frederick's *Posthumous Works* (1789), and Beaumarchais' *Mariage de Figaro* (1784–5); the accumulation of many pleasing friends among the writers of the time; and the development of those political—or "moral"—principles which led to his indictment for high treason in 1794.

Literature, as Charles Lamb has said, will serve very well as a staff, but it would in those days never do as a crutch, and he who set out to make his living by his pen, had to try all sorts of things and keep the ink-pot always open. The hack-work, by which a man must live in the intervals between his outstanding successes, pays but poorly; and, in order to obtain adequate returns, the labours must be multiplied in proportion as the task is menial. We know that when Godwin was writing for *The English Review*, he was paid two guineas a sheet, "in which employment it was [his] utmost hope to gain twenty-four guineas per annum." We find that Holcroft himself, in *Hugh Trevor*, said of this custom of payment by the sheet, that "it frequently happened that a book, which demanded a day to peruse, was not worthy five lines of animadversion." Yet this was the type of labour that Holcroft performed for *The Town and Country Magazine*, for *The English Review*, and for *The Monthly Review*. He did this after finding his

first novel, *Mary*, succinctly condemned by the only review which condescended to notice it. He did this along with pot-boilers of various sorts, and along with his editing of *The Wit's Magazine*, which is principally interesting because it contained one of the earliest printings of *John Gilpin's Ride*. He realized his deficiencies, and desired to see the world and learn more of the manners of men before interpreting and correcting what Ben Jonson would have called the "humours" of his time. His letter to the Earl of Shelburne bears witness to his motives for wishing to visit France. And there he went, although not as a member of the Ambassador's suite. From April to October, 1783, he amused himself in Paris in quaint and curious ways, and picked up all the information he could relative to current books. He had learned French some six years before, but still spoke it with great difficulty. The glittering salons were not for him, nor would their polite arguments have suited his impetuous, opinionated mode of discussion. He was not a gentleman, and would probably have been insulted if so called. He considered "the most useless, and often the most worthless, of all professions, that of a gentleman." He knew not the etiquette of *levees* in England; so it is not surprising to find that he had practically no relations with literary people, or other people of outstanding distinction in Paris. Other Englishmen, in the same half-century, talked with Holbach, with Rousseau, with Beaumarchais, or formed famous

platonic friendships: Walpole with Mme. de Deffand, Hume with Mme. de Boufflers, and Gibbon with Mme. Necker. But not Holcroft. The names which appear in connection with his are not those of persons with the *entrée* into the aristocratic and really intellectual "democracy of genius." We do know that he often walked in the Tuileries Gardens, that he amused himself by counting the number of deformed people on the streets, that he travelled on the Seine to St. Cloud, and that he was accustomed to dine at a *table d'hôte* in the Rue Dauphine. Beyond such trifles and attendance at public ceremonies, his life was taken up with the meanest of literary labours, writing home newspaper squibs for *The Morning Herald*, and watching out for books he might translate, and so hope to pick a few crumbs fallen from the tables of the successful.

Piracy was a common trade among booksellers and their minions. England plundered from France, and America and Ireland from England. He who could turn a volume from one language into another most quickly was certain of profits, and the quality of the performance often seemed not to matter at all; many a one—and at times, in fact, Holcroft[1]—was roundly condemned for "haste" or "hurry" or "inattention." Some-

[1] There were three separate translations of the *Memoirs of Baron Trenck*, issued in 1788, a book which Tate Wilkinson (*Memoirs*, 1 : 198) says was "universally read," and Mary Wollstonecraft, reviewing them in *The Analytical Review* for February, 1789 (3 : 140) says: "Of the three translations, that of Mr. Holcroft is the most complete."

times a French writer would try to regulate the translation of his work by showing preferences to some English writer, and by gaining in return a right of supervision. Mme. de Genlis seems to have agreed in advance to some of Holcroft's translations from her work. An arrangement existed by which Holcroft's friend, Marshall, was to have a forthcoming novel by Mme. de Staël, volume by volume. Marshall wrote to Volney to ask similar privileges with regard to Volney's *Travels in America*. But such arrangements were rare. Usually a work was simply carried across the Channel, as was the *Follies of a Day* (*Figaro*), or sent, as were the *Memoirs of Voltaire*, and transformed as rapidly as possible without regard to the wishes of the cross-Channel author. Beginning practically with the date of his Parisian visit in 1783, Holcroft began to produce an amazingly large and unusually successful succession of translations. A friend in Paris (de Bonneville) pointed out and transmitted to him everything "curious" that came out in the French capital. He has been called "one of the best and most voluminous translators on record." When he himself spoke of this work, he revealed much of his method, more of his preferences, and much of his character, by saying that "translation, though a task most irksome to a mind desirous of fame, should, when undertaken, be executed, though not with temerity, with a self-confiding fortitude."

Nevertheless, the really remarkable thing about these twelve years from 1782 to 1794 has

not yet been mentioned. Holcroft may have translated political memoirs and scientific treatises and books of travel. He may have raced for speed in pirating plays and brought *Figaro* over the Channel in a portmanteau. He may have prepared for English readers such elevating moral narratives as *Sacred Dramas* and the puerile *Tales of the Castle*, where "the sweet tears of sensibility began to trickle." He may have Englished sentimental stories like *The Chaste Loves of Peter the Long* and the *Caroline of Lichtfield*, where "the precious pearls of sensibility brighten in her eye," and love is "nothing more than lively friendship founded on esteem." All of these. Yet the really remarkable thing is that, after handling so much of such material as this, Holcroft could produce striking and characteristic work of his own. *Anna St. Ives* and *Hugh Trevor*, *The School for Arrogance* and *The Road to Ruin* really merit serious consideration.

The purely sentimental comedy had gone, possibly laughed off the stage by the subtle ridicule of *The School for Scandal*. Holcroft considered it "a puling, rickety, unhealthy brat," and used social satire with serious intent, to improve the world across the footlights, and not merely to produce light laughter. He left no doubt in his prefaces that his principles were doctrinaire. That plays written with such barefaced preaching should have been successful is strange. And they were successful. Of *The Road to Ruin*, Mrs. Inchbald furnishes contemporary evidence: "The comedy ranks among

the most successful of modern plays." Later it was said: "Goldfinch was the forerunner of a race of dramatic heroes, who have turned comedy into a school of dashing impertinence, and *The Road to Ruin*, with all its excellence, led the way to that style of fashionable dialogue, which combines the extreme points of metaphysical sentiments and slang phrases, with a success truly enviable, if not altogether unaccountable."

In an age when the doctrinaire novel flourished, it is but natural that our moralizing Holcroft should be found moralizing when he came to write *Anna St. Ives* and *Hugh Trevor*. It might have been the age of *Otranto* and *Udolpho* and *The Monk*. Yet none of this for Holcroft. Writing in *The Monthly Review*, he expressed a dislike for tales of terror as "neither divine nor human, but a strange mockery of both . . . a ridiculous mixture of miracle and matter of fact," and mercilessly flayed one such tale for promulgating the principle of revenge (9: 337; 11: 153; 14: 350). Reviewing an effort by the doctrinaire Bage, he declared that in the novel was to be found "the power of playing upon the mind, interesting the affections, and teaching moral and political truths." He practised what he preached. Indeed, so forcibly doctrinaire were Holcroft's own novels, that Crabb Robinson went on record to say that they had been a mental introduction to the reception of Godwin's *Political Justice*. At this time Holcroft was beginning to look forward to the day when "reform shall become the business of

the nation." In *Anna St. Ives* and *Hugh Trevor*, he was simply writing arguments in the form of fiction, doctrinaire novels touched by the prevailing sentimentality of the century. His motives he explained himself in the preface to *Brian Perdue :*

> Whenever I have undertaken to write a novel, I have proposed to myself a specific moral purpose. This purpose in *Anna St. Ives*, was to teach fortitude to females ; in *Hugh Trevor*, to induce youths (or their parents) to inquire into the morality of the profession which each might intend for himself.

It was an age of moralizing. The philosophers of the eighteenth century were trying to be sane moral philosophers, reasoning about everyday experiences. Rousseau's novel, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, had brought into prominence the principles of deep emotion and stolid virtue. Richardson and Johnson in England were great moral figures. The very subjectivity of the coming Romanticism rested on the strength and truth of moral convictions and instincts. The Revolution itself emphasized an almost Roman virtue, individual, as well as social and political. It was no mere legal quibble, that great uprising of the Third Estate, stirring the whole world with a French Revolution, and demanding more complete and more universal recognition of justice and right. In Pixerecourt's first *Mélodrame* we find the following question and answer :

> *Victor :* Qui t'en donne le droit ?
> *Roger :* Mon amour pour l'humanité.

It was an echo of the Revolution : the insis-

tent sincerity and truth of the movement; the virtue of Holcroft and Godwin, and their ardent radical agitation. The life of Holcroft and the novels of Holcroft at this time are in close correspondence. In both he was always arguing. Whether he was writing plays, or novels, or critiques for *The Monthly Review*, or engaging in friendly conversation, he was emphasizing the importance of a proper education, the theory of perfectibility, and the advancement of the human mind. He later confessed, in his *Travels*: "I thought to teach them a little morality, and was laughed at for my pains. . . . I have often discovered that I am the true Adam Overdo." Yet these ideas were the very impulse of his life. It was eminently characteristic of him to say at this time, in a *Monthly Review* critique:

> Of all the subjects which present themselves to the consideration of man, that of MIND, its laws, powers, and progress, is the most extensive, the most interesting, and the most sublime.

The account of a walk into London from Turnham Green—nine miles out in the direction of Windsor—after a visit to Ralph Griffiths of *The Monthly Review*, is told in a letter written to Griffiths by Holcroft's companion on that walk. The report of the conversation that ensued gives an interesting and typical picture of our strange personality:

> DEAR SIR, Union Court, Dec. 26, 1792.
>
> I got safe to town on Sunday night, but whether I had over-fatigued myself with walking, or whether my

fellow traveller had given too large a dose of *mind*, I know not: certain it is that I was sick all the evening afterwards, and have hardly been quite well since. Of a truth that Mr. Holcroft is an oddity. He has indeed gone before the world, as he says; and the world, whip and spur, will never catch him! His conversation at Turnham Green was sufficiently curious to make one desirous of learning a few of the arcana of his system, and he himself furnished a clue by which I hoped to get at some of the contents of that compressed head of his, which promised to contain "more than your philosophy ever dreamt of." I did get at it indeed, but not without labor: for no sooner had he set his face toward London, than, with a body as stiff as a poker, but inclined toward the ground so as to form with it an angle of about 45 degrees, off he sat [*sic*] at the rate of 5½ miles an hour. Well might he pity those who travelled in carriages: they crept at a snail's pace. We beat everything on the road! Were running footmen in fashion now, Holcroft's fortune would be made; his value like that of diamonds above a certain size, would be inestimable. . . . Men naturally discourse on subjects interesting to them at the time . . . As soon as I had overtaken this *Pennipes*, this featherfooted Perseus, I began to pant and observe that exercise might be carried too far, that our legs might be tired, and . . . No such thing . . . we did not walk with our legs; it was mere prejudice to suppose so: *mind* produced walking: we were only fatigued because we chose to be so: when men gave themselves up for fatigued, then they became fatigued: *mind* could do everything: if we really believed we could walk twenty miles an hour, we should walk it if we were convinced that we could take the monument

on our back, we should infallibly hoist it up and run away with it.—But will mind make a lame man walk?—Certainly, but the man has no business to be lame.—No business! Can he avoid it then?—Certainly, lameness is the effect of error. No one can calculate the operations of *mind*, when it comes to be cultivated: *mind* produces all diseases of the body, and will cure them all: Physic and drugs are only covers for ignorance, or succedaneum for knowledge: The sympathy between minds is wonderful, but we don't try to estimate it; one man laughing shall make a whole audience laugh, and the mind of one person in health shall cure a whole nation of sick.—The operations of the mind on the body, said I, are indeed surprising, and capable of producing wonderful effects where there is not violent change of structure in the body: Change of structure does not signify: mind will cure a cancer, or any other disorder: there is no necessity to die: man's nature is to reproduce himself, and not to decay: it is nonsense to say that we must all die; in the present erroneous system I suppose that I shall die, but why? because I am a fool!—Hurra! said I:—but if a man chops your head off?—It will be impossible to chop your head off: chopping off heads is error, and error cannot exist.—But if a tree falls on you and crushes you? Men will know how to avoid falling trees:—but trees will not fall: falling of trees arises from error.

We had now got opposite the new barracks in Hyde Park, when our Mercury, for he has wings at his head as well as at his feet, observed, what an expanse of mind had been lost about the time of Charles 1st by being mixed with fanaticism. Had it not been for religion, that most baneful of all evils, the progress of mind would

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

It was this sort of frantic philosophizing among the radicals of London that brought Holcroft into their circles and caused him to be indicted for treason in 1794. When he spoke of politics he preached reform. He placed the golden age in the future rather than in the past, and desired to argue the nation into accepting what he deemed good ideas. After England had gone to war with France, he who criticized the government, or found anything good in French principles, was, according to the usual formula of war-time hysteria and suspicion, regarded as an enemy to the kingdom. During his imprisonment, he had his amanuensis in Newgate with him. Yet his literary labours were interrupted, and two dramatic works were delayed past the proper season for production. When he and the others, indicted under the same bill—excepting Hardy, Tooke, and Thelwall, who had all been tried and acquitted—were brought into court and freed without trial, their cases being nol prossed, the others had previously agreed among themselves to maintain perfect silence. Holcroft, however, wished to vindicate himself before the bar of public opinion by making some extensive remarks, but was not permitted to take up the time of the court. He felt that he was in the possession of facts which would not only prove his innocence, but also show spiteful and unwarranted persecution; so it is small wonder that so sensitive a man as he, and one who depended on public approbation for literary livelihood, should wish to remove any suspicion of

dishonour or ill-repute. Yet the opportunity was not granted. So, believing the press to be the terror of despotism, he dashed madly into print with his *Narrative of Facts, relating to a Prosecution for High Treason*, in which he unburdened himself of undelivered speeches, of some ostentatious letters to various people, and many solemn remarks on his own straightforward behaviour. When a noted statesman referred to the twelve reformers so indicted and freed as "acquitted felons," Holcroft rushed forth again with a vigorous *Letter to William Windham, on the Intemperance and Dangerous Tendency of His Conduct*, which was both an answer and a sermon on political morality. Again he was playing the rôle of Adam Overdo. Five years before, when a critic in *The Analytical Review* had impugned the accuracy of Holcroft's translation of Lavater (through the French), Holcroft had detailed the evidence in his behalf on the points then in question, and had ended with the remarks:

> I have been exact in examining, and scrupulous in stating facts. If I appear minute, the weight of the charge against me must be my apology. It has been my endeavour to speak, and I hope I have spoken, without acrimony. Next to the guilt of wilful deceit, by which I should have forfeited all claim to moral worth, and which I would much rather relinquish life than forfeit, I conceive that few acts can be more disgraceful than literary warfare, accompanied by pertinacity of opinion and asperity of retort, between men who pretend to think for the rest of their species.

The words he then wrote from Newman Street, on January 19th, 1790, concerning the *Physiognomical Fragments* of Lavater, and his translation of them, apply almost exactly to his political writings of 1795. And probably they convinced about as many people. Poor Spence—in treason difficulties about the same time—had later to admit that he was considered by the public a fool and a madman, and that "the greater part think it would be best to treat me and my opinions with contempt." Without much alteration, or exaggeration, we can perhaps apply those same words to Holcroft, though Holcroft would have preferred to say "prejudice" rather than "contempt." The *Narrative of Facts*, the *Letter to William Windham*, and the legal proceedings which occasioned their writing and publication, marked another turning point in the life of Holcroft.

The picture drawn by Hazlitt in the concluding chapters of the *Memoirs* of the final fifteen years of the life of Holcroft is incomplete and unsatisfactory, in spite of Hazlitt's use of the diary and his access to what were probably very voluminous notes and papers. In no other portion of the published book does he slip over the years so quickly or so scantily as in this part extending from the release of Holcroft from prison in 1794 to the death of Holcroft in 1809. Possibly he realized only too intimately and too keenly the unsatisfactory manner in which the life of Holcroft moved to its conclusion and, so soon after the death of his subject, did not wish

to dwell on these things. At any rate, Holcroft's activity during these years was undiminished, even though unsuccessful. The record of his amazing literary activity in humble and obscure tasks, of his pertinacity in the face of an almost vindictive criticism, reads almost like a plea for sympathy rather than an account of achievement. Even in personal friends, Holcroft found condemnation, aloofness, scorn, contempt, and ridicule. Here we can paint in new backgrounds and give new values. Here we find the narrative of his life the most uninspiring, and yet the most interesting. The period begins with petulance and ends with sorrow. It begins with indignation and ends with distress.

Decried publicly as an "acquitted felon," and privately "regarded with suspicion and distrust," and critically condemned as an undesirable propagandist whenever he put forth a play so that he was forced to seek refuge in anonymity, what was there left for him? He could see his *Follies of a Day* and his *Road to Ruin* still successfully revived, even by the rival patent theatres. He could continue to delight himself with the pleasures of private life, in exercise on foot or on horseback—principally on foot, "to prevent becoming weary and listless and sinking into decay"—in a ten-mile walk now and then followed by a few billiard games for a shilling stake, in summer excursions into the country, in the friendship of interesting people, and the play of his mind in a stimulating conversation. In his diary we find the names of engravers,

musicians, artists, liberal politicians, dramatists, actors, poets, editors, critics, pamphleteers, publishers, statesmen, scholars, and Nonconformist divines with whom he was more or less intimate at the time. Well might he say that he felt a kind of vacuity of heart when deprived of the intercourse with accustomed friends. He was somewhat resigned to his fate, at least in his most philosophical moments, for he wrote to William Dunlap:

> That man is independent whose mind is prepared to meet all fortunes and to be happy under the worst; who is conscious that industry in any country will supply the very few real wants of his species; and who, while he can enjoy the delicacies of taste as exquisitely as a glutton, can transfer that luxury by the activity of his mind and body to the simplest viands. Every man is a slave, though he were more wealthy than Midas.

A Bostonian by the name of William Austin, who arrived in London in 1803, has recorded his impressions of Holcroft in the following words:

> Mr. Holcroft, though nearly sixty, has suffered nothing, either from years, laborious mental exertion, or persecution. He has all the activity and vivacity of youth.
>
> Literature is not a little honored, when one of her votaries leaving a mechanical employment at a period of life when habit has usually become mature, has successfully holden the pen and realized a handsome support. . . . Holcroft, who never began to think until his reasoning powers had come to maturity, owing to a

neglect of education, embarrassed by no system, follows the dictates of his own mind, and if he is sometimes erroneous, the error is all his own, it is never borrowed error. Hence, his conversation, embellished by the variety of life which he has seen, is rendered rich, brilliant, original, and impressive.

Happy were the friends who enjoyed that conversation. Stern and irascible as his personality might be, there was nothing which would lessen the infinite unexpectedness of its appeal. These turning years of the two centuries saw many strange things, from the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* to the conquests of Napoleon, from the partition of Poland to the latest Dundas speech in Parliament. Yet among the strange things of the period must be counted the personality of Holcroft, that dynamic and insatiable talker. The neighbourly kindnesses of the little house of Holcroft in Newman Street were equalled only by the vigorous excitement of the discussions at Debrett's, or whatever other bookshop happened to be the forum for the peripatetic philosophers, with their talk and their discussions and Holcroft perhaps the most excitable of all, so excitable in conversation that Coleridge, when asked how he was struck by Holcroft, said he feared he was in much more danger of being struck by him. A few pints of sweet wine and a little music; an evening with Godwin and James Ballantyne; a discussion with Charles Dibdin on Thomson or on theology; a party at which there was, according to Crabb

Robinson, a mental delusion of rearranging the world; a dinner with Dr. Wolcott and a newly arrived American traveller; one at which all but the host were occasional writers for *The Monthly Magazine;* an attempt to find a publisher for Godwin; a proposal to Amelia Alderson, who later married Opie; a little importunate disagreement with Mrs. Inchbald; an argument with Coleridge; a friendly criticism for Stoddart or for Pinkerton—these were some of the things which kept life interesting for the ageing man of letters.

The discussions were lively, and yet they were friendly. Godwin, Marshall, and Holcroft stood ever ready to serve one another, as almost every page of the records of their lives will show. In spite of disagreements, the group continued their friendships and met and argued again. They remind one of Carlyle's dictum, that it is possible to agree quite tolerably except in opinion. As Godwin told Francis Place in 1814:

> There is nothing more to be lamented among persons of high worth and rare qualities, than that they should quarrel. Poor Holcroft used to say that I should never make him quarrel with or alienate himself from me; and so long as he remained perfectly the man he had been, he kept his word.

There were disagreements, to be sure, and the disagreements make the biography the more interesting, as they probably made life more interesting too. It would be hard to understand how it would have been possible to avoid disagree-

ments among such frantic conversationalists. Godwin, in spite of the fact that he had been known at Hoxton for calm and unimpassioned discussion, was called Sir Fretful by some of his friends, got on with Tom Wedgewood only at a distance, and was forced all too often to record in his diary, after a meeting with Holcroft, the single word, "demêle," signifying a flash of temper in the evening which would give way to kindness and real regard in the morning. If such a man was Godwin, what shall we say of Holcroft, "the most fiery of all that spirited crew of persons"; Holcroft, who could write such measured correspondence as appears in the *Memoirs*, and could also pen such an explosion as this, upon the final emergence of *The Rights of Man* from the printing shop:

> I have got it—If this do not cure my cough it is a damned perverse mule of a cough—The pamphlet—From the row—But mum—We don't sell it—Oh, no—Ears and Eggs—Verbatim, except the addition of a short preface, which, as you have not seen, I send you my copy—Not a single castration (Laud be unto God and J. S. Jordan) can I discover—Hey for the New Jerusalem! The millenium! And peace and eternal beatitude be unto the soul of Thomas Paine.

Sometimes the good sense of the parties concerned preserved the friendship—sometimes the wit of a third person. Crabb Robinson says that Holcroft had a violent quarrel with Horne Tooke at a third person's table. At length Holcroft said, as he rose to leave the room, "Mr. Tooke,

you are a —— scoundrel, and I always thought you so." Tooke detained him and said, "Mr. Holcroft, some time ago you asked me to come and dine with you; do tell me what day it shall be." Holcroft stayed. Another time it was the wit of Lamb which saved the situation. Hazlitt was at Godwin's, and had just met Lamb, Holcroft, and Coleridge, who were disputing which was the best—man as he *was*, or man as he *is to be*. "Give me," said Lamb, "man as *he is not* to be."

As for Coleridge—who warred against the prevailing scepticism, and therefore against Holcroft—Hazlitt judged him too impetuous in his attitude toward Holcroft. The two disagreed on so many points, and both wanted to talk so much that trouble was to be expected—and mutual dislike as well. They could no more have got on evenly together in a mutual discussion than Coleridge and Mme. de Staël, reputed conversationalists who wanted to be monologists. Coleridge, in his most superior fashion, despised Holcroft's atheism, and especially the teaching of atheism to the Holcroft children. A story is told of a violent dispute between them, relative to Kant, in the course of which Coleridge accused Holcroft of ignorance, and Holcroft replied that he had indeed read the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in the original. Coleridge answered that he was reminded of a woodcutter's daughter in the Hartz mountains who had found him with a book in his hand and exclaimed: "What! You read Kant? Why,

we that are German born read him and do not understand him." Yet even more interesting than the general conception of the atheist Holcroft and the deist Coleridge, rival oral instructors struggling for the soul of Godwin, are the details of the first meeting between these two vigorous disputants. Joseph Cottle tells of it:

Mr. Coleridge now changed the subject and spoke of Holcroft; who, he said, was a man of but small powers, with superficial rather than solid talents, and possessing principles of the most horrible description; a man who at the very moment he denied the existence of the Deity, in his heart believed and trembled. He said that Holcroft and other atheists, reasoned with so much fierceness against a God, that it plainly shewed they were inwardly conscious there *was* a God to reason against, for a nonentity would never excite passion.

He said that in one of his visits to London, he accidentally met Holcroft in a public office without knowing his name, when he began, stranger as he was, the enforcement of some of his diabolical sentiments! which, it appears, he was in the habit of doing at all seasons, and in all companies; by which he often corrupted the principles of those simple persons who listened to his shallow and worn out impieties. Mr. Coleridge declared himself to have felt indignant at conduct so infamous, and at once closed with the prating atheist, when they had a sharp encounter. Holcroft then abruptly addressed him: "I perceive you have *mind*, and know what you are talking about. It will be worth while to make a convert of *you*. I am engaged at present, but if you will call on me to-morrow morning," giving him his

card, "I will engage, in half an hour, to convince you there is no God."

Mr. Coleridge called on him the next morning, when the discussion was renewed, but none being present except the disputants, no account is preserved of this important conversation; but Mr. Coleridge affirmed that he beat all his arguments to atoms; a result that none who knew him could doubt. He also stated that instead of *his* being converted to atheism, the atheist himself, after his manner, was converted; for the same day he sent Mr. Coleridge a letter saying his reasoning was so clear and satisfactory, that he had changed his views and was now a *theist*. The next sun probably beheld him an atheist again, but whether he *called* himself this or that, his character was the same.

Soon after the foregoing incident, Mr. Coleridge said he found himself in a large party, at the house of a man of letters, amongst whom, to his surprise, he saw Mr. and Mrs. Holcroft, when to incite a renewal of their late dispute, and before witnesses (in the full consciousness of strength), Mr. Coleridge enforced the propriety of teaching children, as soon as they could articulate, to lisp the praises of their Maker; "for," said he, "though they can form no correct idea of God, yet they entertain a high opinion of their *father*, and it is an easy introduction to the truth, to tell them that their Heavenly Father is stronger and wiser and better than their earthly father."

The whole company looked at Mr. Holcroft, implying that *now* was the time for him to meet a competent opponent, and justify the sentiments which he had so often triumphantly advanced. They looked in vain. He maintained, to their surprise, a total silence, well

remembering the severe castigation he had so recently received. But a very different effect was produced on Mrs. Holcroft. She indignantly heard, and giving vent to her passion and her tears, said she was quite surprised at Mr. Coleridge talking that way before her when he knew that both herself and Mr. Holcroft were atheists!

Yet another amusing incident of animated discussion and loss of temper is told with reference to the first meeting between Holcroft and the actor, George Frederick Cooke, at which our dramatist showed that he had a real sense of justice, as well as a spirit of vehement contradiction:

Mr. Cooper, to meet the wishes of his two earliest friends, invited Messrs. Godwin, Holcroft, Cooke, and Marshall, and some others to dine at his lodgings in the spring of 1804. During the repast, conversation turned upon duelling, in consequence of the recent death of Lord Camelford, and Holcroft, in reprobating the practice of this honourable murder, or in supporting the doctrines of truth and philosophy with more of the *fortiter in re* than the *suaviter in modo*, contradicted Cooper, Marshall, and others in rather an abrupt and dictatorial manner. Cooke, who had been silent, as was generally the case until he got the influence of a few glasses, at length made some observations, which were met with the same spirit of contradiction, and the same abruptness of manner, which had characterized Holcroft in all his remarks. The veteran of the buskin did not sink before the republican dramatist, but with a bitter sarcastic look, and his sharpest tone of voice, after a short pause, which gave double force to his thrust,

cried—"Upon my honour, Mr. Holcroft, you shall have a patent for being paramount,"—finishing, however, with a smile, which might in some measure, soften the severity of the reproof. Holcroft was silenced. Conversation on various topics occupied the company, in which Godwin, with his usual kindness of manner and energetic eloquence, freely joined—but Holcroft remained mute. At length, awakening as from a dream of abstractness, he replied to Cooke after an interval of nearly half an hour, as if unconscious that any time had elapsed, in nearly these words:

"Your reproof, Mr. Cooke, must be just. I am thoroughly convinced from your words, and the mode in which you uttered them, that my manner must be rude and irritating, and highly injurious to the cause of which I would willingly be the advocate. I thank you, Sir, for correcting what I ought to have corrected myself, but I would willingly have you believe, that it is only the external appearance, arising from unhappy habit, which is offensive, and which is not a true index of my mind at the time of speaking; for I am convinced, upon a strict examination, that could you have read my mind at the moment my manner was the most repulsive, you would have seen nothing but an honest zeal for truth; and *that* could not have been repulsive to you."

Frederick Reynolds tells of other queer actions on the part of Holcroft, as follows:

We took a small house in Newman-street; where amongst other very pleasant companions, I must enumerate Mrs. Siddons, and where soon after our *entrée* [1802], Holcroft, with whom I was only slightly acquainted and who lived on the same street, did me

the favor to pay me a visit. After seating himself, he averred, in his usual frank, blunt manner, that his sole motive for calling on me was, to know whether I meant to be agreeable; that is, as we were neighbours, whether I intended we should be intimate.

If Holcroft's conversational excursions about town led him on to many a gymnastic discussion, and reveal to us strange traits of the man, the quiet hours at home in his own library reveal even stranger ones. Into the oddest corners his curiosity led him. He could turn with ease from ridiculing Fletcher's *Purple Island* to the reading of German history or French philosophy, from the *Wars of Justinian* to the *Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*. In his library of over two thousand titles, there appeared the pre-revolutionary rationalists, a remarkably complete collection of English dramatists, radical pamphlets, French plays, British novels, books on travel and on the fine arts, Italian plays, English poems, and tracts on Deism. The multiform character of his interest is further demonstrated by the list of over two thousand separate prints and many books of prints.

Yet, this library and this art collection he was compelled to sell in order to discharge his debts before leaving for the Continent in 1799. From 1795 to 1798 ill luck—or "persecution" as he would have called it—attended all his literary ventures. It may really have been, as Holcroft believed, that the publicity given his extreme opinions, in connection with the indictment of

1794, was the cause of this, and the fact that he had been publicly accused without being publicly vindicated. Still, whatever the cause, the fact remains that this very period of his life, from 1794 to 1809, which is so rich in curious anecdotes about Holcroft, was a time of discouragements, of unsuccessful productions, and of financial difficulties. He saw play after play of his condemned. He took refuge in anonymity and, though rewarded by having *He's Much to Blame* played "By Command," he could not increase his profits. He was reduced to doing inferior and uncredited hack-work for the theatres and to returning to the irksome task of translation. He set himself bravely to the tasks in hand, but seemed not to be able to re-establish his reputation. He was practically compelled to go abroad :

> It is full two years, I believe much more, since I first conceived the project. . . . I had a house and establishment, which, my family being dispersed, were a heavy and unnecessary expense ; my debts were great, and several of them of so long standing that I remembered them with a poignant anxiety, neither were my creditors, however they might forbear to dun me, entirely satisfied. These debts could only be discharged by the sale of my effects, and the breaking up of what in my opinion has become an immoral establishment, to support which I subject myself to labours, turmoils, and obligations. Persecuted at the theatre as I continually have been from the appearance of *Love's Frailties* whenever a piece was known to be mine, what could I do better than disappear from the scene, and no longer

excite malice or anger, call it what you will, that I could not appease.

A superficial survey of the period which extends from Holcroft's return to London in 1802 until his death in 1809, would hit only upon the successful and much-emphasized works of these years, like the *Travels* (1804), *A Tale of Mystery* (1802), and *Deaf and Dumb* (1801), or perhaps discover some success in *The Lady of the Rock* (1805). Yet a wider collection of inconsequential details rearranges our preconceived ideas and makes up an entirely different background for the picture. Even the success of the *Travels* was due largely to the plates; and the comment of Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review* is of some value in tending to correct the impression given in the *Memoirs* and elsewhere that the *Travels* were unqualifiedly well received:

From the pen of Mr. H. we expected at least something amusing; but the greater part of his work does not rise above the denomination of light reading; and light reading, when it is dilated into two capacious quartos, is apt to become as burdensome to the intellect as matter more substantial. . . . Of the common offences,—vulgarity, pertness, and trifling, or absolute silliness, Mr. H. has certainly his full share to answer for. It would be unjust, however, not to add that he is occasionally lively, ingenious, and amusing; that he is generally goodnatured and tolerant; and that there is an air of authenticity in most of his narratives that recommends these to the belief of the reader, in spite of the affectation of the language in which they are delivered.

By continuing in this manner, we could supplement the *Memoirs* with authentic detail to show how convincingly *The Vindictive Man* was hissed off the stage in 1806; how *Brian Perdue* (1805), though successfully translated at Paris, was ill-received at home; how Holcroft, in 1807, descended to mediocre summarizing for *The Artist*, edited by a helping friend; how he stole from his own *Wit's Magazine* to resell his old satire of twenty years back as *Tales in Verse* (1806); how he again drew upon old material and filled in between translations from distinguished foreigners, with the most ordinary of all ordinary writing in *The Theatrical Recorder* (1805); which soon failed; how he had again to sell his library to pay his debts; how a few months before he died he had a long novel rejected by the publishers to whom he offered it. Yet the saddest discoveries of all are the discoveries of unsatisfactory critiques in the contemporary reviews, and the slurring words which greeted him. After *The Lady of the Rock* appeared in 1805, no production of any kind was even tolerably successful. He felt his works were condemned more through prejudice than through judgment. He spoke of having dedicated his life to the service of the race and the cause of reform, and of being for that reason alone surrounded by a host of enemies. He took refuge in anonymity. He even told Godwin that the failure of Godwin's *Antonio* (1800) was due to political animosity. He saw the whole world in a conspiracy of persecution against him:

and as a consequence forfeited any possibility of securing the favour of the world.

He still hoped to try his case before the bar of public opinion in print, whatever case it might be, and tried in such a way that it is small wonder he met further sneers. After having had a play of his "publicly condemned" at Drury Lane in 1807, he rushed it into print with the following prefatory note:

> *The Vindictive Man* is published with no hope of deriving profit, but to afford any person, who shall be so disposed, an opportunity to inquire how far it merits the oblivion to which it was consigned by the audience at Drury Lane. A revisal of the public sentences, passed at our theatres, on pieces approved and condemned, might greatly promote the progress of good taste.

And the play itself was a hideous thing, a ranting bit of autobiographical interpretation, telling of a poet starving and scribbling in a garret, abused by the reviewers and neglected by the public. When he rushed to the press with this, just two short years before his death, years full of distress and disappointment, all the more keen for an old man who has really known public favour, *The Monthly Mirror* forgot the praise it had written of him in 1799 and said:

> The prologue of this piece requested the audience to "cut and come again," but they did the former so effectually as to render the latter impracticable. Mr. Holcroft, not liking damnation, takes his case out of

the court of Apollo, or rather desires that the jury should withdraw and reconsider their verdict. He has "*no hope*" of recovering damages, but looks to get the former judgment reversed. The first is wise, the second would be unjust.

Of such a *Vindictive Man* as the present, we may say what Rousseau affirms of a true misanthrope! "S'il pouvoit exister, il feroit horreur." The cause is not equal to the effect; the one is trifling, the other diabolical; and granting the possibility of such a character in life, it argues a total want of judgment to expect, by bringing it on the stage, to excite applause. If "*that's your sort*," nothing can be worse.

The Anti-Jacobin joined in the chorus of condemnation; Gifford, the other self-made man of the century, held him in either feigned or real contempt; his daughter was called a frivolous, romantic girl, with an uncultivated mind, a character devoid of delicacy, and a total want of method, order, and discretion; the very horse he rode in the Park was sneered at as a Rosinante; his attitude toward his children was publicly condemned; he was stigmatized for his ceaseless writing in an effort to earn a living as "The other Mr. Endless"; Thomas Knight walked away from his company because he did not wish "to be seen with a man of Holcroft's notorious political principles"; he was dubbed "childish and weak," and "a peevish insect wriggling through the world." He was an early mark for Jeffrey's Edinburgh onslaught.

Tales in Verse (1806) was the last thing he

published. This is the way *The Edinburgh Review* received it :

> Mr. Holcroft's cumbrous pleasantry forcibly reminds us of the donkey's attempt to sport like a lap-dog—so offensive are his foibles and so very ponderous his levity.

The Monthly Mirror was even more scathing :

> Be it the care of the author's friends to keep him quiet, and by no means to trust pen, ink, and paper near him. Mr. Holcroft has long been a book-making man of some cleverness, and much labour. He has, however, had the best of the flask, and let him rest assured that if he still persist to pour on, he will have nothing for his pains but dregs.

Mrs. Inchbald actually fell sick from overwork after two consecutive years of translation; the strain of continuous production was too difficult to bear. After writing *Fleetwood* in 1805, Godwin remarked that he felt his mind exhausted, and Holcroft, now ten years older, was also exhausted in mind and body. His daughter, Fanny, was ever at his side, when he could no longer afford to pay an amanuensis; she copied plays, took dictation, and transcribed letters; she even translated Weisse's *Rosamund*, Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*, Celenio's *Baron*, Calderon de la Barca's *Fortune Mends*, and Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* for his *Theatrical Recorder*, and won herself a place in the 1806 *Biographical Register of Living Authors* as a novelist in her own right. While Fanny was doing this for him, it would

be proper to say that the pen, which the unkind critic said should be kept at a distance, had practically fallen from feeble fingers. Educated in obscurity, persecuted by fate, deprived of resources, insulted by the vulgar, this man was finishing his life in distress. That his wife afterwards married James Kenny, and that these two and Fanny who lived in an old building almost in a state of starvation, are often mentioned in the *Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore;* that the daughter married Carlyle's friend, Badhams, lived in a rambling shed of a house, and had Lamb make puns about her new name; that Holcroft left his family totally unprovided for; that Prince Hoare gave fifty pounds, and Mrs. Inchbald, out of her little, ten, to a subscription for his wife and children; that one of the strangest friendships that ever existed between votaries of literature, that between Godwin and Holcroft, was renewed at the last hour after being broken off for a long time; that Hazlitt completed the *Memoirs* which Holcroft was too weak and failing to continue on his deathbed, even in dictation, and that Lamb made new puns about that also—all of these scattered facts might be elaborated upon at length, but they are quite inconsequential beside the prime fact that Holcroft was actually dead. The constant efforts to better himself, and to teach others to do likewise, had quite used up this startling personality. Even on his deathbed he continued strong in his desire to transform his ideas and his experiences into bound and printed books for

the edification of coming generations and the betterment of the world. Whether in the *Memoirs* or elsewhere we find matter for condemnation, we cannot fail to render credit to that astonishing power of will which raised him where it did and made him what he was. We cannot fail to pay at least a personal tribute to that man "whose opinions are sometimes so strange, and sometimes so good."

PRINCIPAL EVENTS IN HOLCROFT'S LIFE

1745. Born in London.

1751. Father failed in business and moved to country. T.H. went peddling with his parents on foot along the country roads.

1757. Apprenticed as a stable-boy at Newmarket.

1760. Worked as apprentice shoemaker with his father in London.

1764. Teaching reading in a Liverpool school.

1765. Married and returned to London.

1765. First writing for publication: contributions in *The Whitehall Evening Post*.

1770. Went to Dublin with Macklin, the actor-manager.

1771. Returned to England and became strolling player.

1772 (?). Married Matilda Tipler of Nottingham.

1773. Son, William, born.

1775. Daughter, Sophy, born at Cockermouth.

1775–1776. Second wife died at Cockermouth.

1777. Arrived in London and employed by Sheridan in inferior parts.

1778. First dramatic writing: *The Crisis.*

1778–1779. Summer acting at Canterbury, Portsmouth, and Nottingham.

1778. Married for the third time.

1780. First novel: *Alwyn.*

1780. Political pamphlets on the Gordon Riots and Trial of Lord Gordon.

1781. On success of his comedy, *Duplicity*, quitted the stage for literature.

1783. In Paris, April to October, securing material for translations.

1784. September, pirated *Le Mariage de Figaro.*

1786. Made acquaintance of William Godwin, who rated Holcroft among his "four principal oral instructors." Friendly with other radicals.

1791. Assisted in the publication of *The Rights of Man.*

1792. Joined Society for Constitutional Information. Spoke frequently and lengthily and served on committees.

1794. October. Indicted for high treason along with Thomas Hardy, Horne Tooke, John Thelwall, and others.

1794. December. Released without trial or pardon.

1799. March 4th. Married Louisa Mercier.

1799. Sold his library and pictures and moved to Hamburg.

1801. January. Arrived in Paris.

1802. October. Returned to London.

1806. Daughter, Louisa, born.

1807. Again sold his library and pictures.

1809. Died, March 23rd, without funds.

MEMOIRS

OF THE LATE

THOMAS HOLCROFT.

Written by Himself,

AND CONTINUED

TO THE TIME OF HIS DEATH,

FROM HIS DIARY,

NOTES, AND OTHER PAPERS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1816.

ADVERTISEMENT
TO THE FIRST EDITION (1816)

MR. HOLCROFT had intended, for several years before his death, to write an account of his own life. It is now only to be regretted that he did not begin to execute this design sooner. Few lives have been marked with more striking changes; and no one possessed the qualities necessary for describing them with characteristic liveliness in a greater degree than he did. It often happens, that what we wish most done we fail to do, either through fear lest the execution should not answer our expectations, or because the pleasure with which we contemplate a favourite object at a distance makes us neglect the ordinary means of attaining it. This seems to have been the case with Mr. Holcroft, who did not begin the work he had so long projected till within a short time of his death. How much he had it at heart may, however, be inferred from the extraordinary pains he then took to make some progress in it. He told his physicians that he did not care what severity of treatment he was subjected to, provided he could live six months longer to complete what he had begun. By dictating a word at a time, he succeeded in bringing it down to his fifteenth year. When

the clearness, minuteness, and vividness of what he thus wrote are compared with the feeble, half-convulsed state in which it was written, it will be difficult to bring a stronger instance of the exertion of resolution and firmness of mind, under such circumstances. The whole of this account is given literally to the public. This part comprises the first seventeen chapters, or Book I. The remainder of the *Life* has been compiled from Mr. Holcroft's Letters; from Journals and other papers to which I had access; from conversations with some of his early and most intimate friends; and from passages in his printed works, relating to his own history and adventures, pointed out to me by them. Some of the anecdotes I have also heard mentioned by himself; but these are comparatively few. I first became acquainted with Mr. Holcroft about ten years ago[1]; my chief intercourse with him was within the last three or four years of his life.

WM. HAZLITT.

January, 1810.

[1] In 1802 Hazlitt had at least one letter of introduction from Holcroft, and in 1806 he was at Godwin's and at Holcroft's houses for supper. (*The Hazlitts*, Edinburgh, 1911, pp. 412, 422.)

BOOK I

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CHAPTERS

The Life of Thomas Holcroft

CHAPTER I[1]

I WAS born in London, in Orange Court, Leicester Fields,[2] on the 10th day of December, 1745, old style; and was baptized and registered in St. Martin's Church, where my name is erroneously written Howlcroft.[3] In a will of one of my uncles, which may be seen in Doctors' Commons,[4] the name is spelt

[1] This and the remaining Chapters of the first book are in Mr. Holcroft's own words.—Hazlitt

[2] Known later as Orange Court, Leicester Square. (W.-G.) This is the same Orange Court where the painter Opie once lived and where Edmund Kean went to a "dirty little schoolhouse." (F. W. Hawkins, *Life of Kean*, I: 11.)

[3] The Register Book of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields reads: "Baptized in December 1745, 25, Thomas Howcraft of Thomas and Sarah, Dec. 11."

[4] John, only brother of his father, groom in the King's stables. Cf. J. P. Rylands, *The Family of Holcroft*, Leigh, 1877. In *David Copperfield* (Chapter XXIII) Dickens says of "Doctors' Commons":—"It's a little out-of-

Houldecroft. From this it appears that our family did not pay much attention to subjects of orthography, or think the manner in which their name was spelt, a matter of importance.[1]

Most persons, I believe, retain through life, a few strong impressions of very early childhood. I have a recollection of being played with by my parents, when very young, and of the extreme pleasure it gave me. On another occasion, as I and one or two of my brothers and sisters were playing in the court, and kneeling and peeping down a cellar window, where there were some fowls, a shutter that belonged to the window, and was fastened up, by some means or other got loose, and entirely cut off one side of my sister Anne's thumb;—a disaster never afterwards to be forgotten. My father one day whipped me

the-way place, where they administer what is called ecclesiastical law, and play all kinds of tricks with obsolete monsters of Acts of Parliament, which three-fourths of the world know nothing about, and the other fourth supposes to have been dug up, in a fossil state, in the days of the Edwards. It's a place that has an ancient monopoly in suits about people's wills and people's marriages, and disputes among ships and boats."

[1] There were in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many distinguished people by the name of Holcroft, and among them several were called Thomas. Yet there seems no possibility of connecting our Thomas Holcroft with any distinguished ancestors. Cf. Daniel Lysons, *Environs of London*, 2: 365; 4: 224; *Notes and Queries*, passim; and the *Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission*, passim.

very severely for crying to go to a school in the neighbourhood, where children were sent rather to keep them out of the way, than to learn anything. He afterwards ordered an apprentice he had to take me to school. This apprentice was an exceedingly hard-featured youth, with thick lips, wide mouth, broad nose, and his face very much marked with the small-pox, but very kind and good tempered. I perfectly remember his carrying me in my petticoats, consoling me as we went, and giving me something nice to eat. Perhaps I bear his features in mind the more accurately, because I occasionally saw him afterwards, till I was seven or eight years old, when he used to visit my father, who was then under misfortunes. He seldom came without something kind to say, or good to give: but his last and capital gift, too precious to be ever forgotten, consisted of two small books. One was the History of Parismus and Parismenes,[1] and the other, of the Seven Champions of Christendom.[2] These were to me an inestimable treasure, that often brought the rugged, good-natured Dick to my remembrance, with no slight sense of obligation.

Till I was about six years old, my father kept a shoe-maker's shop in Orange Court; and I have a faint recollection that my mother dealt in greens and oysters. After I became a man,

[1] A romance of Bohemia (1598) by Emanuel Ford (fl. 1607).—W.-G.

[2] Mentioned in Holcroft's late play, *The Vindictive Man* (1806), as a book which fired the blood of a poor self-educated author.

my father more than once pointed out the house to me: the back of it looks into the King's Mews, and it is now No. 13. My father was fond of speculation, and very adventurous. I believe he had been set up in trade by my uncle John, who lived several years, first as a helper and afterwards as a groom in the King's stables; where, being an excellent economist, he saved money. For a time, my father, through John's influence, was admitted a helper in the stables; but he did not continue there long, not having his brother's perseverance. How or when he procured the little knowledge of shoemaking which he had, I do not recollect; though I have heard him mention the fact. He was not bred to the trade. He and a numerous family of his brothers and sisters all spent their infancy *in the field country;* or, as I have heard him describe it, the most desolate part of Lancashire, called Martin's Muir, where my grandfather was a cooper; a man, according to my father's account, possessed of good qualities, but passionate, and a dear lover of Sir John Barleycorn. My grandmother was always mentioned by my father with very great respect.[1]

[1] From J. Paul Rylands, F.S.A., *The Family of Holcroft*, Leigh, Lancashire, 1877 (*British Museum*, 9902 b.b. 6), we learn that the father, Thomas Holcroft, was born at Martin Mere, near Southport, in 1717; that he went to school at Rudderford, lived for a time in the Sheepcote Hills, and died at Knutsford, in Cheshire, 1797. He was buried at Peover Church. (Cf. *Memoirs*, 2: 234.) Mr. Rylands says that he "kept a shop, probably a cobbler's shop," but it is

At the period of which I speak, the West End of London swarmed with chairmen; who, that they might tread more safely, had their shoes made differently from those of other people; to which particular branch of the trade my father applied himself with some success. But he was not satisfied with the profits he acquired by shoe-making: he was very fond of horses, and having some knowledge of them, he became a dealer in them. Few persons but the great,

possible that he was for a time in the business of tinsmith. The grandfather, another Thomas, followed the trade of a "white cooper" at Burscough, near Ormskirk. (Cf. *Memoirs*, 1 : 178 n. and 2 : 234.) Mr. W. D. Pink has kindly obliged me with the following, which among many disconnected records of early Holcroft families, some now extinct, comes nearer an explanation than any other possible: "Many attempts have been made to connect Thomas Holcroft, dramatist, with the well-known Lancashire family of that name, but all so far have failed. I notice in the Ormskirk Register—of which only Vol. I, 1557 to 1628, has as yet been issued—that Holcrofts were in that parish from the days of Elizabeth, *Thomas* being one of the Christian names. Most likely the dramatist derived from these Holcrofts, and if so—presuming a connection at all, which is most likely—the connecting link between the Ormskirk family and the parent stem would be remote, I fear prior to the days of existing Registers and Wills. In the list of Wills probated at Chester I do not find among the Holcrofts a single one styled 'of Ormskirk' to the end of the 17th century; one may suspect that this line of the family were always in poor circumstances and left no Wills."

at this time kept any sort of carriage. It was common for those who wished to ride out, to hire a horse for the day; and my father kept several horses for this purpose. If his word was to be taken, they were such as were not very easily to be matched. The praise he bestowed on them for their performances, and his admiration of their make and beauty, were strong and continued. Young as I was, he earnestly wished to see me able to ride. He had a beautiful poney (at least so he called, and so I thought, it): but it was not more remarkable for its beauty, than its animation. To hold it, required all my father's strength and skill; yet he was determined I should mount this poney, and accompany him, whenever he took a ride. For this purpose my petticoats were discarded; and as he was fonder of me than even of his horses, nay, or of his poney, he had straps made, and I was buckled to the saddle, with a leading-rein fastened to the muzzle of the poney, which he carefully held. These rides, with the oddity of our equipage and appearance, sometimes exposed us to the ridicule of bantering acquaintance; but I remember no harm that happened.

About the same time, my father indulged another whim; whether he was led to it by any particular accident, I cannot tell. I must have been about five years old, when he put me under the tuition of a player on the violin, who was a public performer of some repute. Either parental fondness led my father to believe, or he was flattered into the supposition, that I had an

uncommon aptitude for the art I had been put to learn. I shall never forget the high praises I received, the affirmation that I was a prodigy, and the assurances my teacher gave that I should soon be heard in public. These dreams were never realized.

My father was under great obligations to my uncle John, and was afraid, especially just at that time, of disobliging him. My uncle's pride took the alarm; and after marking his disapprobation, he asked with contempt, "Do you mean to make a fiddler of the boy?" My practice on the violin therefore ceased; and it is perhaps worth remarking, that, though I could play so well before I was six years old, I had wholly forgotten the art at the age of seven; for, after my master left me, I never touched the instrument. In the days of my youthful distress, I have sometimes thought, with bitter regret, of the absurd pride of my uncle.

CHAPTER II

THUS far my infantine life had passed under much more favourable circumstances than are common to the children of the poor. But, when I was about six years old, the scene suddenly changed, a long train of increasing hardships began, and I have no doubt my sufferings were rendered more severe from a consciousness of the little I had suffered till then. This may therefore be properly considered as the first remarkable era in my life.

How far the state of my father's affairs might contribute to the steps he took, is more than I now can tell[1]: but on a sudden the housekeeping broke up, the horses were sold, and we went into Berkshire, somewhere beyond Ascot Heath, about thirty miles from London, where my father had taken a house. What became of his effects, in what manner they were sold, and of every circumstance of that kind, I am totally ignorant.

I suppose the time of our residence in Berk-

[1] Investigation in the New Bankruptcy Buildings at Lincoln's Inn Fields, where records subsequent to 1710 are kept, does not reveal the name of Holcroft's father as a bankrupt.

shire to have been about twelve months. The house where we lived, was situated at the corner of the road, the last of a small Green or Common, down which the road had a descent. For I remember my father at first had a tall, high-boned hack, on the bare back of which I used by his order to gallop down the hill, though I felt great difficulty in keeping my seat. It was in this retired spot that my father himself began to teach me to read. The task at first I found difficult, till the idea one day suddenly seized me of catching all the sounds I had been taught from the arrangement of the letters; and my joy at this amazing discovery was so great, that the recollection of it has never been effaced. After that, my progress was so rapid, that it astonished my father. He boasted of me to every body; and that I might lose no time, the task he set me was eleven chapters a day in the Old Testament. I might indeed have deceived my father by skipping some of the chapters, but a dawning regard for truth, aided by the love I had of reading, and the wonderful histories I sometimes found in the Sacred Writings, generally induced me to go through the whole of my task. One day as I was sitting at the gate with my Bible in my hand, a neighbouring farmer, coming to see my father, asked me if I could read the Bible already? I answered, yes; and he desired me to let him hear me. I began at the place where the book was open, read fluently, and afterwards told him that, if he pleased, he should hear the tenth chapter of Nehemiah. At this he seemed still more amazed, and

wishing to be convinced, bade me read. After listening till he found I could really pronounce the uncouth Hebrew names so much better and more easily than he supposed to be within the power of so young a child, he patted my head, gave me a penny, and said I was an uncommon boy. It would be hard to say whether his praise or his gift was most flattering to me. Soon after, my father's apprentice, the kind-hearted Dick, who came backward and forward to my father on his affairs, brought me the two delightful histories I have above-mentioned, which were among those men called Chapman's Books.[1] It was scarcely possible for any thing to have been more grateful to me than this present. Parismus and Parismenes,[2] with all the adventures detailed in the Seven Champions of Christendom,[3] were

[1] Books sold by chapmen or pedlars.—W.-G. For an interesting collection of such books see the entries listed and commented upon in *A Catalogue of Chap-Books, Garlands, and Popular Histories in the possession of James Orchard Halliwell*, London, 1849. See also *Cambridge History of English Literature*, xi : 520–2.

[2] Originally printed in 1598. Abridged and constantly printed as a penny history. Gifford, in his *Autobiography*, says that at the age of fifteen "I had read nothing but a black-letter romance, called *Parismus and Parismenes*, and a few loose magazines." Halliwell, op. cit., pp. 6–8.

[3] First published in 1596. It is chiefly a compilation from Bevis, Guy, and other old English romances; and, according to the quaint language of Ritson, contains "all the lyes of Christendom in one lye." Halliwell, op. cit., p. 35.

soon as familiar to me as my catechism, or the daily prayers I repeated kneeling before my father. Oh, how I loved poor Dick!

My father was an excellent pedestrian, and would often walk to London and back again, more than sixty miles, in the same day. Sometimes he dined at home, and went to London in the afternoon; and even then, I rather think, though I cannot be certain, that he made a point of sleeping in his own house. In height he was about five feet four, perfectly free from corpulency, sober, and satisfied with plain, wholesome diet. He used to speak with great self-complacency of the manner in which he overcame competitors in walking, with whom he sometimes chanced to meet. "I have been overtaken by tall men," he would say, "with whom I could not keep pace, and they have bid me good-bye, and told me they should be in London at such a time before me: but they were every one of them mistaken. They could not proceed without stopping to rest, and taking their pint of beer, their bread and cheese, or whatever they could get to eat and drink. I was never far behind them, I wanted nothing to eat or drink, I was not weary, I passed the houses in which they were sitting, and got forward sometimes more than a mile before them; while they would make another call, perhaps, and another, so that I always arrived before them."

One afternoon, however, he was desirous of going to town at a later hour than usual, and therefore, for expedition's sake, he borrowed a

light grey horse of a neighbour, on condition that it should be returned that evening. He then mounted, and placed me behind him, trusting to my courage and good sense for finding my way home with the horse. I knew not how far he took me, except that we passed over some part of Ascot Heath, if not all of it; and about an hour before it was dark, he alighted, left me on horse-back, and carefully gave me such directions as he supposed I could not mistake. In this he conjectured rightly; I began to trot away, anxious to get home before it was too dark; but unluckily for me, some time after we had parted, with no human being in sight, nor any likelihood of meeting one, the horse stumbled among some ruts, and threw my hat off. To have lost my hat would have been a terrible misfortune; I therefore ventured to alight and pick it up. Then it was that I perceived my distress. I found every attempt I made to remount wholly ineffectual, and all I could do was to endeavour to drag the sluggish animal along, and cry bitterly. Twilight was fast approaching, and I alone on the heath (I knew not how far from home), and never expecting to reach that desired place that evening. At length, however, the white railing of the Race Course on Ascot Heath came in sight, and I conceived hopes of remounting. Accordingly I with great difficulty prevailed on my grey nag to stand tolerably nigh the railing, on which I clambered, and with almost unspeakable joy I found myself once more seated on his back. I had another piece of good

fortune; for, before I had gone far, a neighbour happened to be passing, who, seeing a child so circumstanced, came up, asked me some questions, heard the story I had to tell, and not only conveyed me safe to the village, but to his own house, where he gave me something comfortable to eat and drink, sent the horse to its right owner, and put me into the charge of someone, who took me home.[1]

I know nothing that tends so much as the anecdotes of childhood, when faithfully recorded, to guide the philosopher through that very abstruse but important labyrinth, the gradations that lead to the full stature, peculiar form, temperament, character, and qualities of the man. I am therefore anxious to recount all those concerning myself, which I suppose may conduce to this purpose.

My father was very fond, and not a little vain, of me. He delighted to show how much I was superior to other children, and this propensity had sometimes a good effect. One evening when it was quite dark, daylight having entirely disappeared, and the night being cloudy, he was boasting to a neighbour of my courage; and his companion seeming rather to doubt, my father replied, he would put it immediately to the proof. "Tom," said he, "you must go to the house of Farmer such-a-one" (I well remember the walk, but not the name of the person), "and ask whether he goes to London to-morrow."

[1] Mr. Holcroft has made use of this incident in the first volume of Hugh Trevor, see p. 40.—Hazlitt.

I was startled, but durst not dispute his authority, it was too great over me, besides that my vanity to prove my valor was not a little excited: accordingly I took my hat, and immediately obeyed.

The house I was sent to, as far as I can remember, must have been between a quarter and a half a mile distant; and the road that led to it, was by the side of the hedge on the left hand of the Common. However, I knew the way well enough, and proceeded; but it was with many stops, starts, and fears. It may be proper to observe here, that although I could not have been without courage, yet I was really, when a child, exceedingly apprehensive, and full of superstition. When I saw magpies, it denoted good or ill luck, according as they did or did not cross me. When walking, I pored for pins or rusty nails, which, if they lay in certain directions, foreboded some misfortune. Many such whims possessed my brain—I was therefore not at all free from notions of this kind, on the present occasion. However, I went forward on my errand, humming, whistling, and looking as carefully as I could; now and then making a false step, which helped to relieve me, for it obliged me to attend to the road. When I came to the farm-house, I delivered my message. "Bless me, child," cried the people within, "Have you come, this dark night, all alone?" "Oh yes," I said, assuming an air of self-consequence. "And who sent you?" "My father wanted to *know*," I replied equivocally. One of them then offered to take me home, but of this I would

by no means admit. My whole little stock of vanity was roused, and I hastily scampered out of the house, and was hidden in the dark. My return was something, but not much less alarming than my journey thither. At last I got safely home, glad to be rid of my fears, and inwardly not a little elated with my success. "Did you hear or see anybody, Tom," said my father, "as you went or came back?" "No," said I, "it was quite dark, not but I thought once or twice, I did hear something behind me." In fact, it was my father and his companion, who had followed me at a little distance. This, my father, in fondly praising me for my courage, some time after told me.

CHAPTER III

ALL that I now recollect more of this residence in Berkshire is, that my father, after having been from home longer than usual, put a sudden, and to me unexpected end to it—took me with him, and for some time travelled round the country.

The first place I distinctly remember myself, was London, where I have a faint notion of having been among boys with their school-books. Whether I was sent to school for a week or two, while my father and mother were adjusting their affairs, and preparing for their new career, is more than I can affirm or deny: though I have no recollection of acquiring any knowledge, a thing which, before this, had begun to make a strong impression on me. If I were really sent to school, it must have been for a very short time, nor could I have been provided with books or other means of improvement. And indeed my father was so straitened in his circumstances, that my mother very soon after agreed to turn pedlar, hung a basket with pins, needles, tape, garters, and other small haberdashery, on her arm, and hawked them through the outskirts and neighbourhood of London, while I trotted after her. I might at first perhaps feel some disgust

at this employment: but use soon reconciled me to it, as the following anecdote will shew.

I cannot say what my father's employment was, while I and my mother were, what they emphatically called *tramping* the villages, to hawk our pedlary. It may be presumed, however, that it was not very lucrative, for he soon after left it, and he and my mother went into the country, hawking their small wares, and dragging me after them. They went first to Cambridge, and afterwards, as their hopes of success led them, traversed the neighbouring villages. Among these we came to one which I thought most remarkably clean, well built, and unlike villages in general: my father said it was the handsomest in the kingdom. We must have been very poor, however, and hard-driven on this occasion; for here it was that I was either encouraged, or commanded, one day to go by myself, from house to house, and beg. Young as I was, I had considerable readiness in making out a story, and on this day, my little inventive faculties shone forth with much brilliancy. I told one story at one house, another at another, and continued to vary my tale just as the suggestions arose: the consequence of which was, that I moved the good country people exceedingly. One called me a poor fatherless child: another exclaimed, what a pity! I had so much sense! a third patted my head, and prayed God to preserve me, that I might make a good man. And most of them contributed either by scraps of meat, farthings, bread and cheese, or other homely offers, to

enrich me, and send me away with my pockets loaded. I joyfully brought as much of my stores as I could carry, to the place of rendezvous my parents had appointed, where I astonished them by again reciting the false tales I had so readily invented. My father, whose passions were easily moved, felt no little conflict of mind as I proceeded. I can now, in imagination, see the working of his features. "God bless the boy! I never heard the like!" Then turning to my mother, he exclaimed with great earnestness—"This must not be! the poor child will become a common place liar! A hedge-side rogue!—He will learn to pilfer!—Turn a confirmed vagrant!—Go on the high way when he is older, and get hanged. He shall never go on such errands again." How fortunate for me in this respect, that I had such a father! He was driven by extreme poverty, restless anxiety, and a brain too prone to sanguine expectation, into many absurdities, which were but the harbingers of fresh misfortunes: but he had as much integrity and honesty of heart as perhaps any man in the kingdom, who had had no greater advantages. It pleases me now to recollect, that, though I had a consciousness that my talents could keep my parents from want, I had a still stronger sense of the justice of my father's remarks. As it happened, I had not only read and remembered the consequences of good and evil, as they are pointed out in the Scriptures, but I had also become acquainted with some of the renowned heroes of fable; and to be a liar, a rogue, and get hanged,

did not square well with the confused ideas I had either of goodness or greatness, or with my notions of a hero.

From the vicinity of Cambridge, we passed on to the Isle of Ely, hawking our different wares, pins, laces, tempting ribbons, and garters, in every village we came to; arriving first at Peterborough, and afterwards taking care to be present at Wisbeach fair. Markets, fairs, and wakes, were indeed the great objects which regulated all our motions.

The Isle of Ely, from its marshy nature, is much infested by the reptile tribes. One day, as we were pushing forward through the grass by the road side, I saw what I imagined to be a beautiful ribbon, striped and spotted with various colours, but chiefly blue and white; and with great surprise catching hold of my mother's arm, I cried, "Look, mammy, look!" No less admiring what she saw than myself, and equally mistaken—"Bless me," said she, "how pretty!" Then stooping to take it up, she touched it; but our surprise now greatly increased, when a large snake uncoiled itself, darted forward, and in a moment was out of sight. My father was much amused at the terror we felt. He had lived for some time with a farmer, and knew the difference between the adder and the common snake tribes, with the harmless nature of the latter. For in summer and autumn, whenever he could come upon a sleeping snake, he made it his diversion to catch it by the tail, shake it when it attempted to rise, and bring it with him wherever he was

going. A country woman, with whom we met shortly after, told us that the breed of snakes was so common in those parts, that they could not be kept out of their cottages, where they frequently took shelter, especially in the night.

The things of which I have the most distinct recollection as connected with the Isle of Ely, are its marshy lands, multiplied ditches, long broad grass, low and numerous draining mills; with the cathedral of Peterborough, which I thought beautiful: but above all, those then dear and delightful creatures, a quack doctor, peeping from behind his curtain, and that droll devil his merry Andrew, apparitions first beheld by me at Wisbeach fair. It was a pleasure so unexpected, so exquisite, so rich and rare, that I followed the merry Andrew and his drummer through the streets, gliding under arms and between legs, never long together three yards apart from him; almost bursting with laughter at his extreme comicality; tracing the gridirons, punchinellos, and pantomime figures on his jacket; wondering at the manner in which he twirled his hat in the air, and again caught it so dexterously on his head. My curiosity did not abate, when he examined to see if there was not some little devil hid within it, with a grotesque squint of his eyes, twist of his nose, and the exclamation, "Oh, ho! have I caught you, Mr. Imp?"—making a snatch at the inside of his hat, grasping at something, opening his hand, finding nothing in it, and then crying with a stupid stare—"No, you see, good folks, the devil of any devil is here!" Then

again, when he returned to the stage, followed by an eager crowd, and in an imperious tone was ordered by his master to mount,—to see the comical jump he gave, alighting half upright, roaring with pretended pain, pressing his hip, declaring he had put out his collar bone, crying to his master to come and cure it, receiving a kick, springing up and making a somerset; thanking his master kindly for making him well; yet, the moment his back was turned, mocking him with wry faces, answering the doctor, whom I should have thought extremely witty, if Andrew had not been there, with jokes so apposite and whimsical as never failed to produce roars of laughter. All this was to me assuredly, "the feast of reason and the flow of soul!" As it was the first scene of the kind I had ever witnessed, so it was the most extatic. I think it by no means improbable, that an ardent love of the dramatic art took root in my mind from the accidents of that day.

CHAPTER IV

THERE are short periods of my life, during which, when endeavouring to retrace them, I am surprised to find I can scarcely recollect any thing of what happened, and this was one of them. How we got from the Isle of Ely,—where we went,—what we did,—the reasons that induced my father and mother to forsake the business of pedlars,—whether he returned to London for a short time, and again sat down to what he called his trade, namely, that of making, or rather mending shoes,—are questions which I cannot answer. This interval, though not very long, must have been of some duration; for the first remarkable fact that presents itself to my mind is the strong recollection I have of being at Coventry, walking with my little sister in my arms in a large desolate back yard, at the outskirts of the city. Through this yard, a deep open common sewer ran, into which my sister either sprang, or fell by accident, where she must almost instantly have been suffocated, had not I, instead of being terrified, and running to call for help, immediately thrown myself on the ground, and dragged her safely out. I ran, at once terrified

and rejoiced, to tell my father and mother what had happened, and was rewarded by the praises I received from them for the good sense and intrepidity I had shewn. It has been my good fortune to have saved more lives than one, but this was the first.

In and of Coventry itself, I remember several little traits and incidents. I was much taken with the virtue, beauty, and magnanimity of Lady Godina[1] :—the misfortune that befel peeping Tom, was a fine mark of divine justice ; and I was equally delighted to think that all the people had bread enough, as I supposed, when the oppressive toll was taken off. Coventry Cross was then standing, and though greatly dilapidated, made no little impression on my imagination, as I walked round and round it, and gazed at its spiral forms, commensurate proportions, numerous little recesses and figures, though half destroyed, that suggested ideas of beauty, sanctity, and the events of past times. Not that I would have it supposed that these ideas passed individually and distinctively through the mind of an uninstructed boy, little more than eight years old, but the effect of them altogether was such as I have here described.

My father, though active and of a strong constitution, was short, slight-built, and wholly unable to contend with men in general. But he was passionate, and free-spoken if he thought himself ill-used, and had thus given offence to

[1] *Sic.*

a powerful, brutal rival in the market, by whom he was treated with great contempt, and threatened with personal chastisement. I well remember the grief and indignation I then felt that my father should be thus degraded; and that he, I, and all belonging to him, should be unable to redress his wrongs.

This happened on a market-day; and I believe it was on the same day that my father, thinking me almost perished with the cold, gave me a pint of ale to drink, which so far inebriated me, that I was quite ashamed. My father himself was a man of such sobriety, that I had heard him often declare that he had never in his life been overcome with liquor. Besides, I loved religious books, and they all informed me, drunkenness was a great sin. I therefore took it very much to heart that I should so early have been guilty of a crime, of which he was entirely innocent. However, he consoled me by taking the blame upon himself for giving me more to drink than I could be supposed able to bear.

It was here that I saw a person of a very odd and almost unaccountable appearance. I could not discover whether he was young or old; for he seemed to be both. The size of his limbs, the form of his body, the colour of his hair and face, were such as might have belonged to a boy of eighteen; and to correspond with these he had something of sprightliness in his manner; but his gait and deportment were those of old age: he stooped in the shoulders, and he had the greatest number of small wrinkles in his face

that I had ever seen. The reason why I mention many of these (in themselves perhaps insignificant) circumstances, is, that the inquiring reader may be able to trace the bent and progress of my mind, and how far I was prone to observation.

CHAPTER V

HAVING been bred to an employment for which he was very ill-fitted, both from his physical and mental powers and propensities, the habit that became most rooted in, and most fatal to my father, was a fickleness of disposition, a thorough persuasion, after he had tried one means of providing for himself and family for a certain time, that he had discovered another far more profitable and secure. Steadiness of pursuit was a virtue at which he could never arrive: and I believe few men in the kingdom had in the course of their lives been the hucksters of so many small wares; or more enterprising dealers in articles of a halfpenny value.

Different circumstances have fixed in my mind the recollection of many of the towns to which we went, and a variety of the articles of my father's trade, but in all probability not a tenth part of either. I at this moment remember in particular, a market-day at Macclesfield in Cheshire[1]; not so much from what we sold,

[1] "Situated by the River Bollen, in the forest of the same name, a Town of great antiquity and very fair and spacious. It has a good Church and a College adjoining to it; and here is also a good Freeschool, and a thriving

though I believe it was some sort of woodenware, of which trenchers and spoons were in those days staple articles, as from a person that caught my attention there. This was a most robust and boisterous woman, more than middle-aged, with a very visible beard, and a deep base voice. I was never weary of listening to, looking at her, and watching all she said or did. I could scarcely think it possible there was such a woman.

I should mention, that to carry on these itinerant trades, my father had begun with purchasing an ass, and bought more as he could; now and then increasing his store by the addition of a ragged poney, or a worn-out, weather-beaten Rozinante. In autumn he turned his attention to fruit, and conveyed apples and pears in hampers from villages to market-towns; among the latter of which I remember, were Tamworth,[1] Newark-upon-Trent,[2] and Hinckley.[3] The bad nourishment I met with, the cold and wretched manner in which I was clothed, and the excessive weariness I endured in following

Manufacture of Mohair Buttons." Defoe's *Tour*, 5th ed. (1753), "with additions, improvements, and corrections which bring it down to the year 1753," 2: 372.

[1] "A fine pleasant trading town, eminent for good Ale, and good Company, of the middling Sort." Defoe's *Tour*, ut supra, 3: 392.

[2] "A handsome, well built town." Defoe's *Tour*, ut supra, 2: 417; 3: 40.

[3] "A market-town on the Leicestershire Road . . . noted for a large handsome Church and a high Spire-Steeple all of Stone." Defoe's *Tour*, ut supra, 2: 410.

these animals day after day, and being obliged to drive creatures perhaps still more weary than myself, were miseries much too great, and loaded my little heart with sorrows far too pungent ever to be forgotten. Bye roads and high roads were alike to be traversed, but the former far the oftenest, for they were then almost innumerable, and the state of them in winter would scarcely at present be believed.[1]—Speaking of scantiness of diet, an incident happened to me which shews the great power of taste, or rather of imagination, over the appetite, and which ought to be treasured in the memory of those who endeavour to force the appetites of children. I was travelling after my father in Staffordshire near Wosely bridge, where a country-gentleman had a seat. I went into the house, whether alone or for what purpose I totally forget; but I well remember the fragrant steams of the kitchen, and the longing wishes they excited. As I was going away, a good-natured servant said, "Perhaps you are hungry, little boy?" To which, bashfully hanging my head, I answered, "Yes." "Well, then, stop a minute, I'll give you something very nice:" and accordingly, a large bason of rich pease-soup was brought me, and a spoon. I had never eaten, nor perhaps heard of such a thing before: but the moment I smelt it, and applied it to my palate, I conceived such an excessive dislike to it, that though I felt ashamed, and made every

[1] See Sydney, *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, 2: 523, for general truth of this.

effort I could, I found it impossible to swallow a spoonful. Some servants were by my side, and one of them asked, "What! don't you like it? Can't you eat it?" To which, perfectly abashed, and again hanging my head, I replied, "No." "Ha!" said one of them, "you are a dainty chap, however, I wonder who keeps you, or what it is you do like!" I made no reply, but, hungry as I was, and wretchedly disappointed, hurried away as fast as I could, to overtake my father. I should remark, that since I have grown up, pease-soup has always been a favourite dish with me: perhaps, accustomed as I had been from childhood to the plainest food, and empty as my stomach then was, this high-flavoured composition would unavoidably excite disgust.

My father became by turns, a collector and vender of rags, a hardwareman, a dealer in buckles, buttons, and pewter-spoons; in short, a trafficker in whatever could bring gain. But there was one thing which fixed his attention longer than any other, and which therefore, I suppose he found the most lucrative; which was, to fetch pottery from the neighbourhood of Stone, in Staffordshire and to hawk it through all the North of England. Of all other travelling, this was the most continual, the most severe, and the most intolerable. Derbyshire, Cheshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, the towns and cities of Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Derby, Burton-on-Trent, Litchfield, Tamworth, Atherstone, Nuneaton, Lutterworth, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, nay, as far up

as Warwick, Stratford-upon-Avon, Daventry, Northampton, Newport-Pagnell, Banbury (I well remember its delicious cakes); and on the east, Stamford in Lincolnshire, Grantham, and in short every place within possible reach, or where pottery might be sold, received visits from my father, the asses, and poor me.

What became of my mother during these excursions, I do not accurately recollect, except that she was with us occasionally, as at Macclesfield for instance, where the woman with the beard and base voice so fixed my attention. She was also with us at Litchfield[1] and Coventry. Most probably in general she was left at home, with her child or children.

By home, I mean an old house half in ruins, about two miles on the northeast side of Rugeley, with a kitchen-garden, paddock, and croft, which afforded some scanty supplies to man and beast, when my father found it convenient, or thought proper to rest a little from his labours; but to me this house often became a den of misery. I was not yet nine years old, but I had a variety of employments. First, I was the messenger of the family to Rugeley,[2] whither I took money,

[1] "A county of itself with a jurisdiction extending 10 or 12 miles around . . . the principal city, next to Chester, of all the North West part of England." Defoe's *Tour*, ut supra, 2: 388, 391.

[2] "A handsome built town . . . on the Lancashire and Cheshire Road, or the North West Road from London, Watling Street, and Icknild Street . . . at the joining of all these great roads." Defoe's *Tour*, ut supra, 2: 388.

and brought back delicious white bread, for which it was then famous, with such minor articles as were wanted. But when trusted by myself, I could not help loitering on the road, and examining every new object with an idle, boyish curiosity, from which I derived little profit. So that a journey, which ought to have been performed in less than two hours, generally took me more than half a day. I knew the consequences, and had a kind of horror of them, yet could not resist, could not prevail upon myself to go strait forward; such was the united force of habit and curiosity.

My father was alike extreme in his anger, and in his compassion. He used to beat me, pull my hair up by the roots, and drag me by the ears along the ground, till they ran with blood. Indeed my repeated faults were so unpardonable, that he could scarcely blame himself. Yet probably within an hour after he had exercised his severity upon me, he would break out into passionate exclamations of fondness, alarming himself lest he should some time or other do me a serious mischief, and declaring that rather than so, he would a thousand times prefer instant death.

Chastisements like these were grievous, but they were by no means the whole of what I had to encounter. I know not how it happened, but at this early age I was entrusted with business rather like an adult than a child.

Towards Litchfield, on the right, lay Cannock heath and town; and adjoining to this heath,

on the left, there were coal-pits situated in a remarkable heavy clay country: (I speak from childish recollection, and may therefore expect to be pardoned, should I in description commit any local errors; as I have never been at Cannock, the coal pits, or the heath, since that period). Desirous of employing his asses, yet averse to himself (I know not for what reason) my father frequently sent me to these coal-pits to get a single ass loaded, and to drive him over the heath to Rugeley, there to find a customer for my coals. The article was so cheap, and so near, that the profits could be but very small, yet they were something. Had the weather been fine when I was sent on these errands, the task would not have been so difficult, nor the wonder so great; but at the time I was unfortunately sent there, I have a perfect recollection of deep ruts, of cattle, both asses and horses, unable to drag their legs through the clay, and of carts and waggons that were set fast in it. I do not mean that these accidents happened every day, but they were common to the place: and to poor helpless me, with a creature that could scarcely stand under its burthen, they were not less frequent than to others. When anybody that could assist me happened to be near, I thought myself in luck; but if I was obliged to run from coal-pit to coal-pit, to request the man who turned the wheel to come and help me, the chance of compliance was little. I often got nothing but a surly curse and a denial; so until some unlooked-for accident brought me relief, there my loaded ass, sometimes

heaving a groan at what he suffered, was obliged to stay.

The most remarkable instance of this kind of distress may perhaps deserve recounting. One day, my ass had passed safely through the clay ruts and deep roads, and under my guidance had begun to ascend a hill we had to cross on Cannock heath on our way to Rugeley. The wind was very high; though while we were on low ground, I had never suspected its real force. But my apprehensions began to increase with our ascent, and when on the summit of the hill, nearly opposite to two clumps of trees, which are pictured to my imagination as they stood there at that time, it blew gust after gust, too powerful for the loaded animal to resist, and down it came. Through life I have always had a strong sense of the grief and utter despair I then felt. But what a little surprises me is, that I have no recollection whatever of the means by which I found relief, but rather of the naked and desolate place in which I was, and my inability to help myself. Could I have unloaded the ass, it would not have been much matter; but the coals were brought from the pits in such masses, that three of them were generally an ass-load; any one of which was usually beyond my strength. I have no doubt, however, but I got them by some means or other to Rugeley, and brought the money for them safe to my father, whom I could not help secretly accusing of insensibility, though that was the very reverse of his character.

The coal-pits were situated on the extremity

of an old forest, inhabited by large quantities of red deer. At these I always stopped to look: but what surprised and delighted me most was the noble stag; for to him the deer appeared insignificant. Him I often saw bounding along, eying objects without fear, and making prodigious leaps over obstacles that opposed his passage. In this free state, indeed, he cannot but excite our admiration.

One little anecdote I must not omit. The reader will naturally suppose that from the time I began to travel the country with my father and mother, I had little leisure or opportunity to acquire any knowledge by reading. I was too much pressed by fatigue, hunger, cold, and nakedness. Still however I cannot but suppose, as well from my own propensity to obey the will of God, as from my father's wish to encourage my inclinations of this kind, that I continued to repeat my prayers and catechism morning and evening, and on Sundays to read the prayer-book and bible. At any rate, I had not forgot to read; for while we were at the house near Rugeley, by some means or other, the song of Chevy Chace came into my possession, which I read over with great delight at our fire-side. My father, who knew that my memory was tolerably retentive, and saw the great number of stanzas the ballad contained, said to me, "Well, Tom, can you get that song by heart?" To this question I very readily answered, "yes." "In how long a time?"—"Why, you know, father, I have got such work for to-morrow, and what work you

will set for me the following days, I can't tell; however, I can get it in three days." "What, perfectly?" "Yes." "Well, if you do that, I'll give you a halfpenny." Rejoiced at my father's generosity, "Oh then, never fear," said I. I scarcely need add, that my task was easily accomplished, and that I then had the valuable sum of a halfpenny at my own disposal.

CHAPTER VI

THERE was a single instance in which I travelled on foot thirty miles in one day. Whether the miles were measured or computed, is a circumstance which I now forget: but the roads were so heavy, owing to the strong clay soil, that the last quarter of a mile I had to go, I was obliged to confess I could walk no further, and I was carried on a countryman's shoulders. All those who heard of this, and knew how young, how slight of limb, and stunted in my growth I was, expressed their astonishment, and some their doubts. I think this happened before I was ten years of age.

My father broke up his little establishment near Rugeley, and took me with him into Cheshire, but left me at a village two or three miles from Haslem, where I was entrusted to the care of an old woman, who kept a lodging-house; and whom from the whole of her appearance, as well as her kindness to me, I always remembered with respect. On the evening of my arrival, but later, two travelling Irishmen came in, and were admitted as lodgers. My father had bargained with the old woman, that she was to provide for me: travellers, of course, who come in at sunset, and depart at day-break, provide for them-

selves, or are obliged to be satisfied with what such barren abodes can supply. The Irishmen had provided a halfpenny roll between them; what they might have more I do not know. But my good old dame they noticed to be mashing up a plentiful supper of new milk and potatoes for me, a dish in which their hearts delighted. Whether it was contrivance, accident, or according to rule, I cannot say; we did not, however, sup in the presence of the old woman, but in the room in which we all three slept. No sooner were we here, and I had begun in imagination to devour my delicate mashed potatoes, than the Irishmen came up to me, patted my cheeks, told me what a pretty little boy I was, asked me my name, inquired who took care of me, and to what country I was going; and swore by the holy father they never in all their lives, saw so sweet a looking boy, and so compliant and good-tempered. "Do no," said one of them, "let me taste of your mashed potatoes." "Aye, and me too," said the other—"I *warrand* you don't much care about them! We now are a *dale* more used to them in Ireland: I'm sure you'll be very glad to make an exchange. Here now, here is a very fine half-penny roll, which is very nice *ating*, and which to be sure we bought for our own supper. To be sure, we should be fond enough of it, but we don't care about trifles; and as we have been used to *ate* potatoes all the days of our lives, and you English all like bread, why if you *plase*, my sweet compliable *fillow*, we will just make a little bit of a swap, and so we

shall all *ate* our suppers heartily." The action followed the word; they took my potatoes, and gave me the dry roll: while I, totally disconcerted, and not a little overawed by the wildness of my fellow-lodgers' looks, the strangeness of their brogue, their red whiskers, dark beards, carotty wigs, and sparkling black eyes, said not a word, but quietly submitted, though I thoroughly regretted the dainty supper I had lost, and saw them devour it with an aching heart.

Whenever I write dialogues like these, it is not to be supposed that I pretend to repeat word for word what was said: after the lapse of so many years, such a pretension would on the face of it be absurd. But I do on all such occasions pretend to give a true picture of the impressions that still remain on my mind, to express the tone and spirit in which the words were spoken, and in general to repeat a part of the words themselves.—I cannot too seriously declare that I write these memoirs with a conscious desire to say nothing but the pure truth, the chief intention of them being to excite an ardent emulation in the breasts of the youthful readers; by shewing them how difficulties may be endured, how they may be overcome, and how they may at last contribute, as a school of instruction, to bring forth hidden talent.

CHAPTER VII

NEXT morning early the Irishmen pursued their journey; and when my father returned, I told him in the hearing of our well-meaning old hostess how I had been tricked out of my supper. They immediately joined in reviling the whole Irish nation, concluding as "the great vulgar and the small" generally do on such occasions, that these two fellows, with the cunning kind of robbery they had committed, exhibited a faithful picture of Ireland and Irishmen. 'Till corrected either by great experience, or conscientious inquiry, the human mind has an almost invincible propensity, when any vice which most excites disgust or contempt is remarked in an individual of a particular country, to affirm that it could belong to no one else, and to ascribe it as a general characteristic to the nation at large.

I believe that my father's intentions, when we left Cheshire, were to seclude himself for a time, by working at the shoe-making business; and that for this purpose he took a circuitous route, with a determination to settle at whatever market-town he should find there was a probability of getting employment. This pursuit led us to Northwich, Knutsford, Congleton,

Macclesfield, Sheffield, Chapel in le Frith, in which country the scenery astonished me, and where I was particularly struck with three conic barren rocks, which I remarked to my father, were like three sugar-loaves. We also went to Buxton, Bakewell, Chesterfield, and Mansfield, where sickness detained us for a time. This sickness was a mutual and dangerous fever, which we caught, either by our being unable to reach a lodging-house, or to pay for a lodging, and by our sleeping, in consequence, under a damp hedge, an imprudence that had nearly proved fatal to us; nor have I ever ceased at intervals to feel its effects. Some time after our recovery from the fever, I was seized by an asthma, which became so violent, that it was only occasionally I dared to venture from the house. I can give no account how we were maintained, while we were at Mansfield, nor of the means by which we recovered; but I have a perfect picture before me, of a decent, cleanly house, good attendance, and countenances that were kind and cheerful. At the same time, I have no recollection of conceiving ourselves indebted to charity, or of being under any apprehensions of future want; so that I can hardly suppose that the circumstance which first occasioned our illness, arose from pecuniary distress.

After we had recovered sufficient strength, our next remove was to Nottingham,[1] where we

[1] "One of the most pleasant and beautiful towns in England. . . . Here in 1642 Charles I erected his Royal

lodged in a house not far from the Park, with the Castle in view, and the brook that winds along the low grounds beneath the height on which it is built. A game which I do not remember to have seen played any where else, and which afforded me no little pleasure, was that of two men having each a round bright ball of iron or steel, to which they had the art of giving an elastic right-line direction along the pathway through the Park; and which, if I am not mistaken, they called playing at long bowls, he who could first attain the goal being the winner. Spell and null,[1] bandy,[2] prison-bars,[3] and other field games, in the address or the activity of which my little heart delighted, long before I was permitted to be a partaker in them, were here among the diversions of the summer evening.

Standard." The castle spoken of was erected by William Cavendish, Marquis of Newcastle, in 1674 on the ruins of the one destroyed by Parliament at the end of the war. To Defoe's mind it seemed "to have been modelled after some of the Draughts of Inigo Jones," and already appeared in a much neglected state, the floors of some of the great apartments having been allowed to fall in. The Park was originally intended as a Garden, but later plans simply made it a Park. Defoe's *Tour*, ut supra, 3: 58 et seq.

[1] A game of ball. The ball (-null) is released by a spring from a cup at the end of a piece of steel (-spell). The object is to strike it, when released, as far as possible.—W.-G.

[2] A game similar to hockey.—W.-G.

[3] A game of speed in running from goals or bases.—W.-G.

In many parts, Nottingham is, as I then thought it, a very fine town. To me, who had seen so many, its market-place seemed to claim an undoubted and high superiority. Situated on a gently rising ground, that soon becomes dry after showers, surrounded by inns, shops, and other buildings, and well supplied with almost every article, it is among the largest, most convenient, and handsomest in England. A little beyond it were two remarkable inns, the White Lion, and the Blackamoor's Head; each possessed of vast cellarage, wines of I know not what age, with viands, beds, and other conveniences, such as it gave me the greatest satisfaction to hear described.

One of our four principal rivers, the noble Trent, flows through the meadows below the town, at no very great distance. The scenery round it, to my boyish apprehension, was grand. When the day and the stream were clear, I have often taken a particular pleasure in watching the shoals of fish of the smaller kind in which it abounded, or in now and then catching a glimpse of some of greater magnitude, or in seeing them brought on shore by the dexterous angler. A village, called the Hermitage, lay on its banks, and thither I delighted to walk, because it was connected with circumstances, which interested my imagination.—Here, as well as in other places in the outskirts of the town, there were houses cut in the rock; and I could not but fancy them to have been formerly inhabited by a venerable and holy brotherhood of Hermits. These houses

were indeed to me objects of the greatest curiosity. I could never cease admiring that men should persevere in hewing themselves out such habitations, and that they should turn a thing so barren to so much use and profit; for these rocks were in fact high banks of sand-stone, and on the top of them, that is, on the roofs of their houses, each man had his garden.

I walked much about at Nottingham in company with my father, to whom I was very eager to communicate all my juvenile pleasures, and of whom I also made constant inquiries with respect to the objects we saw. He, however, could oftener make conjectures than give information. I imagine his reason for taking me thus into the air, was, as he hoped, to arrest the progress of the asthma which daily increased, and became alarming; for there were times when I could not walk above a few yards without standing still to recover breath. Such medical people as my father could obtain access to, were consulted; but the general opinion was that unless youth and growth should relieve me, the disease was for life. An intelligent surgeon happened to think otherwise: he entertained hopes, he said, provided an issue was made, and carefully kept open on the inside of each leg below the knee. My father accepted his offer to perforate the skin, and direct me in dressing the issues; for to my known prudence this care was readily committed. The success of the remedy equalled the expectations of the surgeon. The cure, aided no doubt by my youth and

cheerful temperament, was progressively visible from week to week, and my joy and thankfulness to my medical guide were great. Whoever he was, I certainly owe him much; but I have forgotten his name. This must have happened in the year 1756 or 7, but I believe the latter.

CHAPTER VIII

PUBLIC sights even though cruel, have been, through all ages, the delight of the herd of mankind. The sessions were just over, and a malefactor, who had been sentenced to death, was left by the judge for execution. My father proposed that we should accompany the crowd, and see what was to be seen. To this I consented; we followed the cart to the gallows which stood at some distance from the town; and by talking with each other, listening to remarks that were made, some of them charitable, others tainted with a revengeful spirit, and by frequently stopping to observe the agitation of the poor wretch whose life was so soon to cease, I was thrown into a very pensive state of mind. However, taking my father by the hand, I patiently waited the awful moment when the cap was drawn over the culprit's eyes, and he was suddenly lifted into the air. Here his convulsive struggles, to my young and apprehensive imagination, were intolerable: I soon turned my eyes away, unable to look any longer; and my father seeing the pain I was in, said, "Come, Tom, let us go." "Oh yes, yes, father, as fast as we can," was my reply. The effect on my mind was such that I

made, as I suppose, the first fixed resolution of my life, and declared it in a tone that denoted how determined I was,—"Never again, while I live," said I, "will I go, and see a malefactor put to death." Five or six and twenty years afterwards, I thought it an act of duty to change this determination when I was first at Paris in the year 1783. Through life, however, when hanging, and the various ways in which men exterminate each other, have been talked of, I have rarely, if ever, forgotten the poor dying culprit of Nottingham.

It should seem that men have at all times had the good sense to contrast their melancholy and often disgusting institutions, with others of an opposite tendency; and that seldom fail in the very nature of them to revive the sickening heart, and give it animation and delight.

The time of Nottingham Races drew near. My father was a great lover of horses, as I have said; and from his discourse, as well as the little I had seen of these noble animals, I was eager to become better acquainted with them. My father recapitulated the different places at which he had seen horses run, recounted the names of the famous winners he had known, and filled up the picture with the accidents common on such occasions, the amazing cunning of sharpers, the punishments inflicted on some of their detected rogueries; the cries of the betting chair, the tumult of the crowd when the horses were running, the danger of being too near the course, with the difficulty of keeping it clear, the

multitude of gaming and drinking booths, and all that variety of delightful commotion which was calculated to gratify my boyish fancy. The whole scene was like enchantment; and all my wishes were now centered in its being realised.

Ten days or a fortnight before the time, straggling horses for the different plates began to drop in; and of course to take their morning and evening exercise on the course, where they might be seen. This was a pleasure not to be neglected either by me or my father. I was delighted with the fineness of their limbs, their glossy coats; and not a little amused, when following them from exercise to the stable, if I were but allowed to take a peep, and see how their body-clothes were managed, how the currying and brushing of them was performed, their high straw beds prepared, their long hay carefully chosen, and their oats sifted and re-sifted. Every thing about a race-horse is precious: but I pitied them for being so much stinted in their food, and especially when my father told me it must daily decrease, and that the night before they started they must fast.

But the great and glorious part which Nottingham held in the annals of racing this year, arose from the prize of the King's plate, which was to be contended for by the two horses which every body I heard speak considered as undoubtedly the best in England, and perhaps equal to any that had ever been known, Childers[1] alone

[1] 1715. He was one of the fleetest horses ever known, and was never beaten.—W.-G.

excepted. Their names were, Careless and Atlas. Careless,[1] who had been bred by a worthy and popular Baronet of the county (I forget his name) was the decided favourite of every man in Nottingham, gentle or simple. The prowess and equal, if not superior, merit of Atlas, were very boldly asserted by strangers, and particularly by jockeys, betters, and men of the turf. If I do not mistake, Atlas was the property of, and bred by the Duke of Devonshire. However, he had received a previous defeat in running against Careless; and this defeat the men of Nottingham considered as little less than a certainty of future victory. The opposite party affirmed that Atlas, being a remarkable powerful horse (I think seventeen hands high), had not then attained his full force. There was a story in circulation concerning him, which if true deserved to be remembered. He was a full bred horse out of the Duke's own stud, and consequently was intended for training: but being unwieldy when foaled, and as he grew up becoming still more so, he was rejected on account of his size and clumsiness, and banished to the cart breed. Among these inferiors he remained, till by some accident, either of playfulness or fright, several of them started together, and the vast advantage of Atlas

[1] 1751. Was bred by John Borlace Warren of Stapleford, Notts. He seems to have been beaten in 1758 by Atlas at Huntingdon. In 1760 he beat the Duke of Devonshire's Atlas at York, but previously, in 1759, he had suffered another defeat from Atlas at Newmarket.—W.-G.

in speed happening to be noticed, it was then thought proper by the grooms to restore him to his blood companions.

Of those who in the least amused or busied themselves with such affairs, Careless and Atlas occupied the whole discourse. Many people who seemed to reason plausibly enough on the subject, affirmed that if any thing lost the race to Careless, it would be the inferior skill of his rider, by whom neither the ground nor the powers of the horse would be well economized; he was merely the groom of a country gentleman. When the race was over, these accusations were vociferated with wearisome reiteration.

On the appointed day, however, they both started for the King's plate; and I believe there was scarcely a heart on the race-course, that did not swell with hope and fear. As for my own little one, it was all in rapture for Careless. He was so finely made, his coat was so bright, his eye so beaming, his limbs so animated, and every motion seemed so evidently to declare, "I can fly, if I please," that I could not endure the thought of his being conquered. Alas for the men of Nottingham, conquered he was! I forget whether it was at two or three heats, but there was many an empty purse on that night, and many a sorrowful heart.

CHAPTER IX

THESE different incidents had raised a strong desire in my mind to be better acquainted with a subject that had given to me, and as I thought to every body, so much emotion, and I began to consider what might be done. At that time I was rather a burthen to my father than a help. I believe I assisted him a little in the mending of shoes, but my asthma till very lately, as well as my youth, had prevented my making much progress. At one time indeed I had been persuaded, though much against my will, to become apprentice to a stocking-weaver; but this, I forget how, broke off, at which I was very glad: I did not like stocking-weaving. The question now occurred to me, whether it would not be possible to procure the place of a stable-boy, at Newmarket. I was at this time in point of clothing in a very mean, not to say ragged condition, and in other respects, was not much better off. The stable-boys I saw at Nottingham, were healthy, clean, well fed, well clothed, and remarkable rather for their impudence, than seeming to live under any kind of fear or hardship. Except their impudence, I liked every thing else I saw about them; and con-

cluded that if I could obtain so high a situation as this, I should be very fortunate.

These reflections preyed so much upon my mind, that I was at last induced to mention them to my father; and he having a predilection for every thing belonging to a horse, and therefore a high respect for this, the noblest state of that animal's existence, readily fell into my views, and only feared they could not be accomplished. He resolved however that trial should be made; and after inquiring among the Jockeys, thought it advisable to apply to a Mr. Woodcock,[1] who kept stables four or five miles from Newmarket,[2]

[1] Holcroft's father could hardly have applied to a better person. John Woodcock was chosen by Mr. Jenison Shafto in 1761 to ride a match for him on the following conditions: to ride a hundred miles a day on any one horse each day for twenty-nine successive days on any number of horses not exceeding twenty-nine. He began on Newmarket Heath, May 4, 1761, at one o'clock in the morning, and won the sum staked, two thousand guineas, for his master on the 1st of June, at six o'clock in the evening, having ridden on only fourteen horses. One day he rode a hundred and sixty miles owing to his first horse having tired when sixty miles only had been accomplished. See Whyte's *History of the British Turf*, Vol. 1, p. 513.—W.-G.

[2] "Newmarket . . . was more closely identified with horse racing than any other town in the kingdom. . . ." So great had the reputation of Newmarket become by the latter half of the century, that in 1753, garrets were let for four guineas each for the time of the meeting. . . ." Sydney, *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, 2: 236, 238.

where he trained horses entrusted to his care. Mr. Woodcock examined me, asked my age, found I was light of weight, and, I suppose, liking the answers I gave to his questions, to our very great joy, agreed to take me upon trial. In the course of my life, there have been several changes, that each in their turn, greatly affected my spirits, and gave me advantages far beyond what I had ever before enjoyed: of these gradual elevations, this was the first. I should now be somebody. I should be entrusted with the management of one of that race of creatures that were the most admired and beloved by me: I should be well clothed, wear a livery, which would shew I belonged to one of the great: I should not only have food enough, but of that kind which was highly relishing to the appetite of youth; and, in addition to all this, should receive an annual stipend. I jumped as it were, from a precarious and mean existence, where I could not tell what worse might happen, into a permanent and agreeable employment. I had only to learn to ride, and perform the duties of a stable-boy, of which I had no fear, for I supposed them far less difficult than I afterwards found they were.

The grooms that reside at, and in the vicinity of this famed town, are all more or less acquainted with each other; and on Mr. Woodcock's recommendation, I was put under the care of Jack Clarke, who lived with Captain Vernon, he having luckily a led horse, which I was to mount. The day of parting with my father, and of beginning

our journey, was an anxious one. He could not too emphatically repeat the few well meant precepts he had so often given me, nor I too earnestly assure him, I would love and obey him all my life. Notwithstanding his severity, he was passionately fond of me, my heart entered into the same feelings, and there was great and unfeigned affection between us.

CHAPTER X

AS is the custom in travelling with trained horses, we set off early, and walked without hurry. When we stopped to breakfast, the plenty of excellent cold beef, bread and cheese, with the best table-beer, and as much as we pleased, gave me a foretaste of the fortunate change I had made. This indeed exceeded my utmost expectations,—I was entering upon a new existence, —was delighted, full of hope, and cheerful alacrity, yet too timid to be presumptuous. Clarke, being a good-tempered lad, and seeing me happy, attempted to play me no tricks whatever. On the contrary, he gave me all the caution and advice he could, to guard me against being drawn into the common-place deceptions, most of them nasty, many of them unhealthy, and all of them tending to make the poor tyro, a common laughingstock, uniformly practised by the resident boys, upon every new comer. I do not recollect one-half these tricks: but that with which they begin, if I do not mistake, is to persuade their victim, that the first thing necessary for a well-trained stable-boy, is to borrow as many waistcoats as he can, and in the morning after he has dressed and fed his horse, to put them all on, take

a race of perhaps two or three miles, return home, strip himself stark naked, and immediately be covered up in the hot dung-hill; which, they assure him, is the method the grooms take when they sweat themselves down to ride a race. Should the poor fellow follow their directions, they conclude the joke with pail-fulls of cold water, which stand ready to throw over him.

Another of their diversions used to be that of hunting the owl, which is already very whimsically described in a book of much humour, and tolerably well-known, called Tim Bobbin's Lancashire dialect. To catch the owl, is to persuade a booby that there is an owl found at roost in the corner of the barn; that a ladder must be placed against a hole, through which, when the persons within shall be pleased to hoot and hunt him, he must necessarily fly, as the barn door is shut, and every other outlet closed: that the boy chosen to catch the owl must mount this ladder on the outside, and the purblind animal, they say, will fly directly into his hat. When the owl-catcher is persuaded to all this, and mounts to his post, the game begins: hallooing and absurd noises are made; the fellows within divert themselves with laughing at what is to come, and pretending to call to one another to drive the owl from this place to that; while two or three of them approach nearer and nearer to the hole, when they discharge the contents of their full tubs and pails on the head of the expecting owl-catcher, who is generally precipitated from his ladder to some soft, but not very agreeable preparation below.

Clarke warned me against several other of the games at which I should be invited to play; in most of which there was some whim, but a great deal more of that dirty wit in which ill-bred boys are known to delight. Clarke, however, did me this essential service, that he not only taught me to avoid all the snares he mentioned, but rendered me so wary, that all the time I was among this mischievous crew, I was never once entrapped by them. At this they occasionally expressed great wonder; perhaps, had they known the secret, they would have taken their revenge on Clarke.

The weather through the whole of our journey was fine, the ride highly agreeable, and the instruction and information I received from Clarke, made it still more pleasant to me. The only place I can distinctly remember having passed through and made a short stay at, was Huntingdon.

CHAPTER XI

AS I have said, Mr. Woodcock resided in the vicinity of Newmarket, at the distance of three or four miles; and to the house where he lived Clarke immediately took me, gave up his charge, and we parted, I believe with mutual good-will: at least, my feelings towards him were grateful and friendly. As a thing of course, there must have been stables belonging to the house of Mr. Woodcock, but I cannot recollect what train he had under him; and to say the truth, I cannot fix upon any one figure, man, boy, or animal, except a grey filly, on the back of which I was put, and which I was entrusted with the care of.

I doubt if Mr. Woodcock was at home on my arrival. His family was small, and had the air of being genteel. It consisted of himself, his wife, and their daughter, who was about eleven years old. All that I can now recollect of Mrs. and Miss Woodcock, is, having seen them very neatly dressed in white, that the mother assumed a very superior but obliging manner, and that I stood much in awe of her. Trees were thinly scattered to some distance round the house; the parlour was very

neat, and rather spacious. In this I received one of those early lessons in moral honesty, which produce a greater effect on the mind of a child, or even of a youth, than is generally supposed. One afternoon, the tea-things and sugar-bason being set out in the parlour before Mrs. and Miss Woodcock had come down, I was passing the door, and that delicious bait of boyhood, a fine lump of sugar, caught my eye. I looked, considered, looked again, saw nobody, found it irresistible, and venturing step by step on tiptoe, seized the tempting prize, thinking myself secure: but as I turned back to hasten away with it, the first object that struck me was a young gentleman, stretched either on a chair or sopha behind the door, with a book in his hand, a look directed to me, and a smile on his countenance. I cannot express the shame I felt: but I immediately returned the sugar to its place, cast down my eyes, and slunk away, most heartily mortified, especially when the young gentleman's smile broke out into a laugh.

I forgot to mention, though it will easily be supposed, that when I entered on my new profession, my dress was changed, and I was made to look something like a stable-boy.

Miss Woodcock was a very neat little girl, and it somehow happened, though I know not by what means, that I soon got rather in favour with her. She would whisper with me when we met near the house, chide me if she saw what she thought an impropriety, and once or twice condescended to be half or quite angry with me,

while I did all in my power to please her. These trifling advances, however, which spoke rather the innocence of the age, than the intention of the mind, were soon put an end to by an accident that had nearly proved fatal to me.

Perfectly a novice as I was, though I could sit with seeming safety on a quiet horse, I neither knew how to keep a firm seat, nor suddenly to seize one, and I was almost certain of being thrown if any thing that was but a little violent or uncommon happened. I was walking the dark grey filly quite a foot-pace in the forest, when in an instant something startled her, and made her spring aside: by which I was not only unseated and thrown, but unfortunately for me, my foot hung in the stirrup; her fright was increased, she began to kick and plunge violently, and I received a blow in the stomach, which, though it freed me from the stirrup, left me, as was supposed, for no inconsiderable time, dead. Somebody, I imagine, was riding with me, for the alarm was soon given: I was taken up, carried home, treated with great humanity, and by bleeding and other medical means, signs of life at length became visible. All that I myself recollect of a circumstance so very serious, and so very near being mortal, was, that I was thrown, kicked, and dreadfully frightened; that some time afterwards I found myself very ill in bed, in a very neat chamber, and that I was spoken to and attended with great kindness till my recovery.

This accident, however, put an end to my jockeyship in the service of Mr. Woodcock: he

discovered a little too late, that the dark grey filly and I could not be trusted safely together. But though he turned me away, he did not desert me. He recommended me to the service of a little deformed groom, remarkably long in the fork, I think of the name of Johnstone, who was esteemed an excellent rider, and had a string of no less than thirteen famous horses, the property of the Duke of Grafton, under his care. This was acknowledged to be a service of great repute: but the shrewd little groom soon discovered that I had all my trade to learn, and I was again dismissed.

After this new disappointment, I felt perhaps a more serious alarm than is usual with boys at such an age. For, independently of natural sensibility, I had seen so much of the world, had so often been intrusted with its petty affairs, depended so much upon my ability to act for myself, and had been so confident in my assurances to my father that I ran no risk in venturing alone into the world, that my fears were not trifling when I found myself so far from him, thrown out of place, and convicted of being unable to perform the task I had so inconsiderately undertaken. Mr. Johnstone told me I must endeavour to get a place, but that for his part he could say little in my favour; however, he would suffer me to remain a few days among the boys. My despondency was the greater, because, the morning before, when a horse that I was riding shook himself in his saddle, as horses are sometimes observed to do, I fell from his back

as much terrified as if he had been rearing, plunging, and kicking. To hardy grooms, and boys that delight in playing the braggart, this was a truly ridiculous instance of cowardice, and was repeated with no little malignity and laughter.

CHAPTER XII

THE unforeseen relief, that has been given to misfortune under circumstances apparently quite hopeless, has frequently been remarked, and not seldom affirmed to be an incontestible proof of a particular providence.

I know not where I got the information, nor how, but in the very height of my distress, I heard that Mr. John Watson, training and riding groom to Captain Vernon, a gentleman of acute notoriety on the turf, and in partnership with the then Lord March, the present Duke of Queensbury, was in want of, but just then found it difficult to procure a stable-boy. To make this pleasing intelligence still more welcome, the general character of John Watson was, that, though he was one of the first grooms in Newmarket, he was remarkable for being good-tempered: yet the manner in which he disciplined his boys, though mild, was effectual, and few were in better repute. One consequence of this, however, was, that, if any lad was dismissed by John Watson, it was not easy for him to find a place.

With him Jack Clarke lived, the lad with whom I came from Nottingham; this was another

fortunate circumstance, and contributed to inspire me with confidence. My present hopes were so strongly contrasted with my late fears, that they were indeed enviable. To speak for once in metaphor, I had been as one of those who walk in the shadow of the valley of death: an accidental beam of the sun broke forth, and I had a beatific view of heaven.

It was no difficult matter to meet with John Watson: he was so attentive to stable-hours, that, except on extraordinary occasions, he was always to be found. Being first careful to make myself look as much like a stable-boy as I could, I came at the hour of four (the summer hour for opening the afternoon stables, giving a slight feed of oats, and going out to evening exercise), and ventured to ask if I could see John Watson. The immediate answer was in the affirmative. John Watson came, looked at me with a serious, but good-natured countenance, and accosted me first with, "Well, my lad, what is your business? I suppose I can guess; you want a place?"—"Yes, Sir:"—"Who have you lived with? "Mr. Woodcock, on the forest: one of your boys, Jack Clarke, brought me with him from Nottingham." "How came you to leave Mr. Woodcock?"—"I had a sad fall from an iron grey filly, that almost killed me."—"That is bad indeed!—and so you left him?"—"He turned me away, Sir."—"That is honest: I like your speaking the truth. So you are come from him to me?" At this question I cast my eyes down, and hesitated, then fearfully answered, "No,

Sir."—"No! what, change masters twice in so short a time?"—"I can't help it, sir, if I am turned away." This last answer made him smile. "Where are you now, then?"—"Mr. Johnstone gave me leave to stay with the boys a few days." "That is a good sign. I suppose you mean little Mr. Johnstone at the other end of the town?" —"Yes, Sir."—"Well, as you have been so short a time in the stables, I am not surprised he should turn you away: he would have every body about him as clever as himself, they must all know their business thoroughly. However they must learn it somewhere. I will venture to give you a trial, but I must first inquire your character of my good friends, Woodcock and Johnstone. Come to-morrow morning at nine, and you shall have an answer."

It may well be supposed I did not forget the appointment; and a fortunate one I found it, for I was accepted on trial at four pounds or guineas a year, with the usual livery clothing. My station was immediately assigned me. Here was a remarkably quiet three years old colt, lately from the discipline of the breaker; and of him I was ordered to take charge, instructed by one of the upper boys in everything that was to be done, and directed to back him and keep pace with the rest, when they went to exercise, only taking care to keep a strait line, and to walk, canter, and gallop the last. Fortunately for me his temper appeared to be so quiet (for he had been put into full training at an early age), that I found not the least difficulty in managing him.

My reputation, therefore, among the boys, which is an essential circumstance, suffered no stain.

I ought to mention, that though I have spoken of Mr. Johnstone, and may do of more Misters among the grooms, it is only because I have forgotten their christian names: for, to the best of my recollection, when I was at Newmarket, it was the invariable practice to denominate each groom by his christian and surname, unless any one happened to possess some peculiarity that marked him. For instance, I remember a little man in years, grown timid from age, but otherwise supposed to be the best rider in England, and remarkable for his knowledge of almost every race-course, whose name, I think, was William Cheevers; and of whom it was the custom to speak, by calling him Old Will, The Old One, and the like. I mention this, as it may be now or hereafter, a distinctive mark of the changes of manners. I know not what appellations are given to grooms at Newmarket at the present day, but at the time I speak of, if any grooms had been called Misters, my master would certainly have been among the number; and his constant appellation by every body, except his own boys who called him John, was simply John Watson.

With respect to me, his conduct seems to shew that he understood my character better than the grooms who had judged of it before: as I did not long ride a quiet colt at the tail of the string (on whose back he soon put a new-comer), but

had a dun horse, by no means a tame or safe one, committed to my care. Instead of timidity, he must have remarked various traits of courage in me, before he would have ventured on this step. In corroboration of this I may cite the following proof. I continued to ride the dun horse through the winter. It was John Watson's general practice to exercise his horses over the flat, and up Cambridge hill on the west side of Newmarket; but the rule was not invariable. One wintry day he ordered us up to the Bury hills. It mizzled a very sharp sleet, the wind became uncommonly cutting, and Dun, the horse I rode, being remarkable for a tender skin, found the wind and the sleet, which blew directly up his nostrils, so very painful, that it suddenly made him outrageous. He started from the rank in which he was walking, tried to unseat me, endeavoured to set off full speed, and when he found he could not master me so as to get head, began to rear, snorted most violently, threw out behind, plunged, and used every mischievous exertion, of which the muscular powers of a blood horse are capable. I, who felt the uneasiness he suffered before his violence began, being luckily prepared, sat firm, as steady and upright, as if this had been his usual exercise. John Watson was riding beside his horses, and a groom, I believe it was old Cheevers, broke out into an exclamation—"My God, John, that is a fine lad!" "Aye, aye," repeated Watson, highly satisfied. "You will find some time or other there are few in Newmarket that will match

him." To have behaved with true courage, and to meet with applause like this, especially from John Watson, was a triumph, such as I could at this time have felt in no other way with the same sweet satisfaction. My horsemanship had been seen by all the boys,—my praises had been heard by them all.

It will not be amiss here to remark that boys with strait legs, small calves, and knees that project but little, seldom become excellent riders. I, on the contrary, was somewhat bow-legged, I had then the custom of turning in my toes, and my knees were protuberant. I soon learned that the safe hold for sitting steady was to keep the knee and the calf of the leg strongly pressed against the side of the animal that endeavours to unhorse you: and as little accidents afford frequent occasions to remind the boys of this rule, it becomes so rooted in the memory of the intelligent, that their danger is comparatively trifling.

Of the temperaments and habits of blood horses there are great varieties, and those very strongly contrasted. The majority of them are playful, but their gambols are dangerous to the timid or unskilful. They are all easily and suddenly alarmed, when anything they do not understand forcibly catches their attention, and they are then to be feared by the bad horseman, and carefully guarded against by the good. Very serious accidents have happened to the best. But, besides their general disposition to playfulness, there is a great propensity in them to become

what the jockeys call vicious. High-bred, hot in blood, exercised, fed, and dressed so as to bring that heat to perfection, their tender skins at all times subject to a sharp curry-comb, hard-brushing, and when they take sweats, to scraping with wooden instruments, it cannot be but that they are frequently and exceedingly irritated. Intending to make themselves felt and feared, they will watch their opportunity to bite, stamp, or kick; I mean those among them that are vicious. Tom, the brother of Jack Clarke, after sweating a grey horse that belonged to Lord March, with whom he lived, while he was either scraping or dressing him, was seized by the animal by the shoulder, lifted from the ground, and carried two or three hundred yards before the horse loosened his hold. Old Forester, a horse that belonged to Captain Vernon all the while I remained at Newmarket, was obliged to be kept apart, and being foundered, to live at grass, where he was confined to a close paddock. Except Tom Watson, a younger brother of John, he would suffer no lad to come near him: if in his paddock he would run furiously at the first person that approached, and if in the stable, would kick and assault every one within his reach. Horses of this kind seem always to select their favourite boy. Tom Watson, indeed, had attained to man's estate, and in his brother's absence, which was rare, acted as superintendent. Horses, commonly speaking, are of a friendly and generous nature; but there are anecdotes of the malignant and savage ferocity of some, that are scarcely to be

credited: at least many such are traditional at Newmarket.

Of their friendly disposition towards their keepers, there is a trait known to every boy that has the care of any one of them, which ought not to be omitted. The custom is to rise very early, even between two and three in the morning, when the days lengthen. In the course of the day, horses and boys have much to do. About half after eight, perhaps, in the evening, the horse has his last feed of oats, which he generally stands to enjoy in the centre of his smooth, carefully made bed of clean long straw, and by the side of him the weary boy will often lie down: it being held as a maxim, a rule without exception, that were he to lie even till morning, the horse would never lie down himself, but stand still, careful to do his keeper no harm. I should add, however, that the boy must keep awake, not for fear of his horse, but of the mischievous disposition of his comrades. Should sleep happen to overcome him, some lad will take one of those tough ashen plants with which they ride, and measuring his aim, strike him with all his force, and endeavour to make the longest wale he possibly can, on the leg of the sleeper. I remember to have been so punished once, when the blow, I concluded, was given by Tom Watson, as I thought no other boy in the stable could have made so large a wale: it reached from the knee to the instep, and was of a finger's breadth.

CHAPTER XIII

THERE are few trades or professions, each of which has not a uniform mode of life peculiar to it, subject only to such slight variations as are incidental and temporary. This observation is particularly applicable to the life of a stable-boy.

All the boys in the stable rise at the same hour, from half-past two in spring, to between four and five in the depth of winter. The horses hear them when they awaken each other, and neigh, to denote their eagerness to be fed. Being dressed, the boy begins with carefully clearing out the manger, and giving a feed of oats, which he is obliged no less carefully to sift. He then proceeds to dress the litter; that is, to shake the bed on which the horse has been lying, remove whatever is wet or unclean, and keep the remaining straw in the stable for another time. The whole stables are then thoroughly swept, the few places for fresh air are kept open, the great heat of the stable gradually cooled, and the horses, having ended his first feed, is roughly cleaned and dressed. In about half an hour after they begin, or a little better, the horses have been rubbed down, and re-clothed, saddled, each turned in his stall, then bridled, mounted, and the whole

string goes out to morning exercise; he that leads being the first: for each boy knows his place.

Except by accident, the race-horse never trots. He must either walk or gallop; and in exercise, even when it is the hardest, the gallop begins slowly and gradually, and increases till the horse is nearly at full speed. When he has galloped half a mile, the boy begins to push him forward, without relaxation, for another half-mile. This is at the period when the horses are in full exercise, to which they come by degrees. The boy that can best regulate these degrees among those of light weight, is generally chosen to lead the gallop; that is, he goes first out of the stable, and first returns.

In the time of long exercise, this is the first *brushing gallop*. A brushing gallop signifies that the horses are nearly at full speed before it is over, and it is commonly made at last rather up hill. Having all pulled up, the horses stand some two or three minutes, and recover their wind; they then leisurely descend the hill and take a long walk; after which they are brought to water. But in this, as in every thing else (at least as soon as long exercise begins), every thing to them is measured. The boy counts the number of times the horse swallows when he drinks, and allows him to take no more gulps than the groom orders, the fewest in the hardest exercise, and one horse more or less than another, according to the judgment of the groom. After watering, a gentle gallop is taken, and after that, another

walk of considerable length; to which succeeds the second and last brushing gallop, which is by far the most severe. When it is over, another pause thoroughly to recover their wind is allowed them, their last walk is begun, the limits of which are prescribed, and it ends in directing their ride homewards.

The morning's exercise often extends to four hours, and the evening's to much about the same time. Being once in the stable, each lad begins his labour. He leads the horse into his stall, ties him up, rubs down his legs with straw, takes off his saddle and body clothes, curries him carefully, then with both curry-comb and brush, never leaves him till he has thoroughly cleaned his skin, so that neither spot nor wet, nor any appearance of neglect may be seen about him. The horse is then reclothed, and suffered to repose for some time, which is first employed in gratifying his hunger, and recovering from his weariness. All this is performed, and the stables are once more shut up, about nine o'clock.

Accustomed to this life, the boys are very little overcome by fatigue, except that early in the morning they may be drowsy. I have sometimes fallen slightly asleep at the beginning of the first brushing gallop. But if they are not weary, they are hungry, and they make themselves ample amends for all they have done. Nothing perhaps can exceed the enjoyment of a stable-boy's breakfast: what then may not be said of mine, who had so long been used to suffer hunger, and so seldom found the means of satisfying it?

Our breakfast consisted of new milk, or milk porridge, then the cold meat of the preceding day, most exquisite Gloucester cheese, fine white bread, and concluded with plentiful draughts of table beer. All this did not overload the stomach, or in the least deprive me of my youthful activity, except that like others I might sometimes take a nap for an hour, after so small a portion of sleep.

For my own part, so total and striking was the change which had taken place in my situation, that I could not but feel it very sensibly. I was more conscious of it than most boys would have been, and therefore not a little satisfied. The former part of my life had most of it been spent in turmoil, and often in singular wretchedness. I had been exposed to every want, every weariness, and every occasion of despondency, except that such poor sufferers become reconciled to, and almost insensible of suffering, and boyhood and beggary are fortunately not prone to despond. Happy had been the meal where I had enough; rich to me was the rag that kept me warm; and heavenly the pillow, no matter what, or how hard, on which I could lay my head to sleep. Now I was warmly clothed, nay, gorgeously, for I was proud of my new livery, and never suspected that there was disgrace in it; I fed voluptuously, not a prince on earth perhaps with half the appetite, and never-failing relish; and instead of being obliged to drag through the dirt after the most sluggish, obstinate, and despised among our animals, I was mounted on the noblest that

the earth contains, had him under my care, and was borne by him over hill and dale, far outstripping the wings of the wind. Was not this a change, such as might excite reflection even in the mind of a boy!

Boys, when at full liberty, and thus kept in health and exercise, are eager at play. The games most common at Newmarket, were fives, spell and null, marbles, chuck-farthing,[1] and spinning tops, at which, as well as marbles and fives, I excelled. Another game called holes, was occasionally played by a few of the boys. This was a game of some little study, and was much delighted in by the shepherd boys and men, who tended their flocks on that vast plain (as then it was) on which Newmarket stood. Three squares were cut in the earth, one within the other, in each side of which were three holes. Each antagonist had nine warriors or bits of stick to combat the opposing nine. What the rules of the game were, I have forgotten; but I believe the most essential of them was, that he was the victor who could imprison his adversary's men, or leave them no further space to move in. If the choice of the move was given, I, and other good players, knew how to win at this game with certainty. Till I discovered the secret, I was greatly devoted to the game.

In order to have fair play allowed me at these different games, I had my little infant labours of Hercules to perform; or, to speak more properly

[1] A game in which coins are thrown into a prepared hole.—W.-G.

and plainly, to fight my way, and convince all the boys of my own age, I was not to be cowed by them. All boys are wranglers; and out of this propensity the elder boys at Newmarket take pleasure in creating themselves diversion. Jack Clarke, who was about seventeen, was a very good natured, peaceable lad: but all the others in our stable were very assiduous in exciting the little ones to quarrel, and persuading him, who would have wished to remain at peace, to believe he must certainly be a coward. This stigma I was not willing to be loaded with: the consequence was, that battle after battle was fought, first between me and Jack, and then between me and Tom, for two of us were so named. Jack had been a shepherd boy, was older by some months than myself, preceded me as a jockey, was a most inveterate, obstinate, and unfair antagonist, for he would bite, kick, or do any thing to gain the victory, was quite as strong as myself, and excessively hardy. However, he entirely wanted method and presence of mind; and after three or four desperate contests, he was obliged fairly to own he was not my equal. Tom, who came into the service after me, was likewise older, larger-limbed, and had more strength; but my conquest of him was much more easy. He had bones, sinews, and thews, as Shakspeare says,[1] but little heart;

[1] The Shaksperian phrase really is one of the following: "Thy heart, thy sinews, and thy bone," *Troilus and Cressida*, I, 3; "Bones and flesh and sinews," 1 *Henry VI*, III, 1.

he was prevailed on to venture a second combat, but not a third. I had the good fortune also to face and outface those among Lord March's boys, who lived opposite to us, and with whom we had continual intercourse; so that, though I was but thirteen, I became the acknowledged hero among the boys of both stables, under fifteen years of age. Thus much for the footing on which I stood with my rivals within the first half-year after I came to live with John Watson. It must be remembered, that all the tricks of which Jack Clarke had warned me, had been tried upon me in vain. These things, together with my aptitude at play, soon placed me as the leading boy of the young fry.

From nine o'clock in the morning till four, the whole time is at the boy's own disposal, except that of breakfasting and dining, which he is seldom apt to think ill employed. But in summer, spring, and autumn, the stables are again opened at four, and woe to him who is absent! I never was but once, when unfortunately Captain Vernon himself happened to arrive at Newmarket. I never saw John Watson so angry with me before or afterwards; though even then, after giving me four or five strokes across the shoulders with an ashen plant, he threw it away in disgust, and exclaimed, as he turned from me—"Damn the boy! On such a day!"

The business to be done in the afternoon is but a repetition, with little or no variety, of that which I have described for the morning, except that they return to stables at seven, or

rather earlier, again dress their horses, give them a first feed, go to supper themselves, give a second feed, prepare the horses' beds, pick and prepare the hay with which they sup, and by nine o'clock the stables are once more shut up, containing both horses and boys.

CHAPTER XIV

THE time I remained at Newmarket, was upwards of two years and a half; during which many things occurred worthy of remembrance; and though in their nature dissimilar, yet all tending to have that influence on character, by which, if my poor philosophy holds good, character is progressively formed. Instead of relating these different accidents as they occurred, I shall rather endeavour to collect them into classes, beginning with those that immediately belong to the business of a jockey.

I have already remarked how necessary it is for the best horseman never to be off his guard. At the time the little accident I am going to relate happened, and which I could not but then consider as rather disgraceful, I was so persuaded of being always on the alert, and of my power of instantaneously recovering my seat, that I supposed what followed to be nearly an impossibility.—The horse that I then rode happened to be unwell; and did not take his morning and evening exercise with the others. I was therefore ordered to walk him out a couple of hours in the middle of the day, to canter him gently, give him a certain quantity of water,

and canter and walk him home again. The horse was by no means apt to start or play tricks of an uncommon kind: he was besides unwell, and dull in spirits, and I was more than usually unsuspicious of accident. After a walk, and a very gentle gallop, I brought him to water: Our watering troughs stood by a pump under the Devil's Ditch,[1] on the side next to Newmarket. Not foreseeing any possible danger, I held the reins quite slack, and did not sit upright in my seat, but rested on one thigh; when suddenly, without any warning, a grey rook, of the species common to that plain, ascended on the wing up the ditch within half a yard of the ground, and in the direction that would scarcely have missed the horse's head. At this sudden apparition, an arrow from a bow could hardly exceed the velocity with which he darted round to avoid his enemy; and the impulse was so unforeseen, and so irresistible, that I and my whole stock of self-confidence, and self-conceit, lay humbled in the dust. I was greatly afraid, lest my disgrace should be witnessed by any one, and particularly that the horse should make for home; however, his fright ceasing, and his health not disposing him to be wanton, he easily suffered himself to be caught and mounted, and my honour received no stain.

I felt this accident the more, because I was at

[1] A long gully crossing "those pleasant and agreeable plains called 'Newmarket Heath.'" Defoe's *Tour*, ut supra, 2: 86.

this very time receiving new marks of confidence in my talents. A horse bred in Ireland had been brought into our train: John Watson did not think proper to let a boy of heavy weight back him, and among those of light weight, I was the only one in whom he durst confide. It was for this horse that I quitted the Dun horse, on whose back I had obtained such praise, and upon him the other boy of the name of Tom was mounted, but only for two or three mornings. Dun immediately discovered he was Tom's master, and would not keep up in the gallop, but would go what pace he pleased: if struck, he began to plunge, kick, and rear, threw his rider, and made all the boys laugh and hoot at him, and thoroughly exposed him to mortification.—I was frequently obliged to change my horse, but it was always for one more difficult to manage; and not only so, but I generally preserved an honour that had been early conferred on me, that of leading the gallop, let me ride what horse I would. At one of these changes I was transferred to the back of a little mare, which had long been ridden by Jack Clarke, who was wanted for a horse of more power, but of less spirit. On her too I led the gallop. She was not so much vicious as full of play. Whenever I pleased, when the gallop was begun, by a turn of the arm and a pretended flourish, I could make her start out of the line, clap her head between her legs, fling her hind heels in the air, and begin to cut capers. This excitement was generally sufficient for the whole string, who

would start off one after another, each playing his gambols, and perhaps, one or two of them throwing their riders. Under such a temptation for triumph, I was perhaps as prudent as could be expected from a boy of my age; but when John Watson did not happen to be with us, I could not always resist the vanity of shewing that I was equal to the best of them, and quite before the majority. When John was absent, the bad riders would sometimes, before I began the gallop, very humbly intreat me not to play them any tricks; and when they did, I was good-natured enough to comply.

In every stud of horses, there are frequent changes; and as their qualities are discovered, one horse is rejected, and a colt or perhaps a stranger bought and admitted. It happened on such an occasion, that a little horse was brought us from another stud, whence he had been rejected for being unmanageable. He had shewn himself restive, and besides the snaffle, was ridden in a check-rein. I was immediately placed on his back, and what seemed rather more extraordinary, ordered to lead the gallop, as usual. I do not know how it happened, but under me he shewed very little disposition to be refractory, and whenever the humour occurred, it was soon overcome: that he was however watchful for an opportunity to do mischief, the following incident will discover. Our time for hard exercise had begun perhaps a fortnight or three weeks. As that proceeds, the boys are less cautious, each having less suspicion of his horse.

I was leading the gallop one morning, and had gone more than half the way towards the foot of Cambridge hill, when something induced me to call and speak to a boy behind me; for which purpose I rather unseated myself, and as I looked back, rested on my left thigh. The arch traitor no sooner felt the precarious seat I had taken, than he suddenly plunged from the path, had his head between his legs, his heels in the air, and exerting all his power of bodily contortion, flung me from the saddle with only one foot in the stirrup, and both my legs on the off side. I immediately heard the whole set of boys behind shouting triumphantly, "A calf, a calf!" A phrase of contempt for a boy that is thrown. Though the horse was then in the midst of his wild antics, and increasing his pace to full speed, as far as the tricks he was playing would permit, still finding I had a foot in the stirrup, I replied to their shouts by a whisper to myself, "It is no calf yet." The horse took the usual course, turned up Cambridge hill, and now rather increased his speed than his mischievous tricks. This opportunity I took with that rashness of spirit which is peculiar to boys; and notwithstanding the prodigious speed and irregular motion of the horse, threw my left leg over the saddle. It was with the utmost difficulty I could preserve my balance, but I did: though by this effort I lost hold of the reins, both my feet were out of the stirrups, and the horse for a moment was entirely his own master. But my grand object was gained: I was once more firmly

seated, the reins and the stirrups were recovered. In a twinkling, the horse, instead of being pulled up, was urged to his utmost speed, and when he came to the end of the gallop, he stopped of himself with a very good will, as he was heartily breathed. The short exclamations of the boys at having witnessed what they thought an impossibility, were the gratification I received, and the greatest, perhaps, that could be bestowed.

I once saw an instance of what may be called the grandeur of alarm in a horse. In winter, during short exercise, I was returning one evening on the back of a hunter, that was put in training for the hunter's plate. There had been some little rain, and the channel always dry in summer, was then a small brook. As I must have rubbed his legs dry if wetted, I gave him the rein, and made him leap the brook, which he understood as a challenge for play, and beginning to gambol, after a few antics he reared very high, and plunging forward with great force, alighted with his fore-feet on the edge of a deep gravel-pit half filled with water, so near that a very few inches further he must have gone headlong down. His first astonishment and fear were so great, that he stood for some time breathless and motionless: then, gradually recollecting himself, his back became curved, his ears erect, his hind and fore leg in a position for sudden retreat; his nostrils from an inward snort burst into one loud expression of horror; and rearing on his hind legs, he turned short round, expressing all the terrors he had felt by the utmost

violence of plunging, kicking, and other bodily exertions. I was not quite so much frightened as he had been, but I was heartily glad when he became quiet again, that the accident had been no worse. The only little misfortune I had was the loss of my cap, and being obliged to ride back some way in order to recover it.

Among the disagreeable, and in some degree dangerous accidents that happened to me, was the following. We had an old grey blood gelding touched in his wind, called Puff, on which John Watson generally used to ride. He had some vicious tricks, and the thing that made him dangerous was, that, in the jockey's phrase, he had lost his mouth, that is, the bit could make no impression on him, and he could run away with the strongest rider: but the whim did not often take him. The watering troughs were filled once a day, and as they were about a mile and a half distant, each lad performed that duty in turns, being obliged to walk for that purpose to the Devil's Ditch and back. One day, when it was my turn, old Puff being in the stable, John Watson allowed me to shorten my task by a ride, of which I was very glad, and Puff was soon brought out. For the office of filling the troughs, it was necessary to take a pail, and accordingly I flung one with the rim over my right shoulder, and under my left arm, as was the way with us when we walked. I then mounted, but had not gone far, before I found Mr. Puff was determined on one of his frolics. He set off at a good round gallop. This I should

not have regarded in the least, had it not been for the pail at my back. But he was a tall horse, the ruts before the race-course began were numerous, rough, and often narrow, and he amused himself with crossing them; so that the rim of the pail was very disagreeable, and now and then hurt my back severely. I foresaw, however, that my only remedy was to tire him out at his own diversion. As soon, therefore, as I had an opportunity, I turned him upon the turf, by which I avoided the worst jolts of the pail; and instead of struggling with him, I gave him head, hurried him forward as fast as he could go, passed along the side called the flat, turned in beside the Devil's Ditch, forbore to push him when he came to the watering troughs, but found the obstinate old devil was resolved not to stop. I then took him full gallop up Cambridge hill, and into Newmarket, supposing his own home would satisfy him. But no! away he went into the town, while some boys belonging to other stables exclaimed, "Here is old Puff running away with Wat's Tom." At a certain distance down the main street, was a street on the left, by which making a little circle, I might again bring his head homewards, and that road I prevailed on him to take; but as he was not easily guided, he thought proper to gallop on the causeway, till he came to a post which bent inwards towards the wall, so much that it was doubtful whether his body would pass. He stopped short at a single step, but luckily I had foreseen this, or I should certainly

have been pitched over his neck, and probably my back would have been broken, had I not employed both hands with all my force to counteract the shock. Having measured the distance with his eye, he saw he could pass, which to me was a new danger: my legs would one or both of them have wanted room, but with the same juvenile activity, I raised them on the withers, and away again we went, mutually escaping unhurt. By this time, however, my gentleman was wearied; in two minutes we were at home, and there he thought proper once more to stop. The worst of it, however, was, that I had still to water my troughs. I shall conclude this chapter with a fact which may deserve the attention of the philosopher, as an instance of deep feeling, great sagacity, and almost unconquerable ambition among horses; and which goes nearly to prove, that they themselves understand why they contend with each other. I have mentioned a vicious horse, of the name of Forester, that would obey no boy but Tom Watson: he was about ten or eleven years old, and had been a horse of some repute, but unfortunately his feet foundered, for the cure of which he was suffered to remain a great part of his time at grass. However, when I had been about a year and a half at Newmarket Captain Vernon thought proper to match him against Elephant, a horse belonging to Sir Jennison Shaftoe, whom by the bye I saw ride this famous match. Forester, therefore, had been taken up, and kept in training a sufficient time to qualify

him to run this match; but it was evident that his legs and feet were far from being in that sound state which such an exertion required, so that we concluded he must be beaten, for the reputation of Elephant arose out of his power rather than his speed. Either I mistake, or the match was a four mile heat over the strait course; and the abilities of Forester were such, that he passed the flat, and ascended the hill as far as the distance post, nose to nose with Elephant; so that John Watson who rode him began to conceive hopes. Between this and the chair, Elephant, in consequence of hard whipping, got some little way before him, while Forester exerted every possible power to recover at least his lost equality; till finding all his efforts ineffectual, he made one sudden spring, and caught Elephant by the under-jaw, which he gripped so violently as to hold him back; nor was it without the utmost difficulty that he could be forced to quit his hold. Poor Forester, he lost; but he lost most honourably! Every experienced groom, we were told, thought it a most extraordinary circumstance. John Watson declared he had never in his life been more surprised by the behaviour of a horse.

CHAPTER XV

THE feature in my character which was to distinguish it at a later period of life, namely, some few pretensions to literary acquirement, has appeared for a time to have lain dormant. After I left Berkshire, circumstances had been so little favourable to me, that, except the mighty volume of Sacred Writ (which I always continued more or less to peruse, wherever I found a Bible) and the two small remnants of romance I have mentioned, letters seemed to have lost sight of me, and I of letters. Books were not then, as they fortunately are now, great or small, on this subject or on that, to be found in almost every house: a book, except of prayers, or of daily religious use, was scarcely to be seen but among the opulent, or in the possession of the studious;[1] and by the opulent they were often disregarded with a degree of neglect which would now be almost disgraceful. Yet in the course of six or seven years, it can hardly be imagined that not a single book fell in my way; or that if it did, I should not eagerly employ such opportunity as I had

[1] See Sydney, *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, 2: 134–5, for general truth of this.

to know its contents. Even the walls of cottages and little alehouses would do something; for many of them had old English ballads, such as Death and the Lady, and Margaret's Ghost,[1] with lamentable tragedies, or King Charles's golden rules, occasionally pasted on them.[2] These were at that time the learning, and often, no doubt, the delight of the vulgar. However, I may venture to affirm, that during the period we have passed, I neither had in my possession, nor met with any book of any kind which I had leisure and permission to read through. During my residence at Newmarket, I was not quite so much in the desert, though, as far as my limits extended, I was little removed: a tolerable estimate of the boundary may be formed from the remaining chapters of this book.

Whether I had or had not begun to scrawl

[1] A ballad of this title in Percy's *Reliques* (ed. 1886, 3: 308) was long attributed to David Mallet under the title of William and Margaret (see Phelps, *Beginnings of Romantic Movement*, pp. 177–82), but is to be distinguished from the other William and Margaret (see Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 2: 199). Aaron Hill found it in a halfpenny broadside in 1724, and reprinted it in *The Plain Dealer;* Mallet claimed it, and later included it among his own poems (see *English Poets*, 1810, S. Johnson and Alex. Chalmers, 14: 48). The melodramatic writer, Edward Fitzball, based upon it, and quoted it, in his play, *Margaret's Ghost*.

[2] Chap-books of ballads and moral behaviour well known and widely read in the eighteenth century.—W.-G.

and imitate writing, or whether I was able to convey written intelligence concerning myself to my father for some months after I left him, I cannot say, but we were very careful not to lose sight of each other; and following his affection, as well as his love of change, in about half a year he came to Newmarket himself, where he at first procured work of the most ordinary kind at his trade. There was one among his shop-mates whom I well remember, for he was struck with me and I with him: he not only made shoes, but was a cock-feeder of some estimation;[1] and what was to me much more interesting, he had read so much as to have made himself acquainted with the most popular English authors of that day. He even lent me books to read: among which were Gulliver's Travels, and the Spectator, both of which could not but be to me of the highest importance. I remember after I had read them, he asked me to consider and tell him which I liked best: I immediately replied, "there was no need of consideration, I liked Gulliver's Travels ten times the best." "Aye," said he, "I would have laid my life on it; boys and young people always prefer the marvellous to the true." I acquiesced in his judgment, which, however, only proved that neither he nor I understood Gulliver, though it afforded me infinite delight. The behaviour of

[1] "The chief amusement of many country gentlemen was cock-fighting, . . . then as common as cricket matches have become int hese days." Sydney, op. cit., I: 232.

my father, who being at work, was present at this, and two or three other dialogues in which there was a kind of literary pretension, denoted the pride and exultation of his heart. He remarked, "that many such boys as Tom were not to be found! It was odd enough! He knew not where Tom had picked it up, he had never had a brain for such things; but God gave some gifts to some, and others to others, seeing He was very bountiful: but if he guessed rightly, He had given Tom his share!" My father was not a little flattered to find that the cock-feeder was inclined to concur with him in opinion. I remember little else of my literary cock-feeder; yet the advantages I had gained from him in letting me know there were books like these, and introducing me, though but to a momentary view of Swift and Addison, were perhaps incalculable.

That love of the marvellous which is natural to ill-informed man, is still more lively in childhood. I used to listen with the greatest pleasure to a tale of providential interference; my blood thrilled through my frame at a story of an angel alighting in a field, walking up to a worthy clergyman, telling him a secret known only to himself, and then persuading him to change his road, by which he avoided the murderers that were lying in wait for him. Yet I know not how it happened, but even at this time I refused to believe in witches; and when stories of hobgoblins, of houses that were haunted, or of nightly apparitions were repeated, I remained

incredulous. I had either invented or heard some of the plain arguments which shewed the absurdity of such opinions. It will be seen in the following chapter, that my incredulity in this respect was of use to me, though I cannot account for the manner in which I came by it at so early an age.

Books of piety, if the author were but inspired with zeal, fixed my attention whenever I met with them: "The Whole Duty of Man"[1] was my favourite study, and still more Horneck's "Crucified Jesus."[2] I had not yet arrived at Baxter's "Saint's Everlasting Rest,"[3] or "The

[1] Probably first published in 1676. Halkett-Laing note a 52-page edition of 1717 and ascribe it to Browne Willis, LL.D. A later, 1733 edition of 315 pages has been variously ascribed to Lady Dorothy Pakington, Richard Allestre, and many others.

[2] "The Crucified Jesus; or a full account of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," published in 1686, 7th edition in 1727, by Anthony Horneck (1641–97), so popular an Anglican preacher of the Restoration that his parish was said to extend from Whitehall to Whitechapel. Sir Leslie Stephen (D.N.B.) remarks: "He cannot be reckoned among the philosophical writers of his time."

[3] Richard Baxter (1615–91) has been called "the creator of our popular Christian literature." His volume, published 1649–50, "leaped at a bound into its still enduring fame." (D.N.B.) The Cambridge History of English Literature, II: 369, remarks: "This literature formed an important feature in the stock-in-trade of the smaller booksellers."

Life of Francis Spira"; [1] but John Bunyan I ranked among the most divine authors I had ever read. In fact I was truly well-intentioned, but my zeal was too ardent, and liable to become dangerous.

One day as I happened to be passing the church,[2] I heard voices singing, which exercise I admired; and having, as I thought, a tuneful voice, I was desirous of becoming acquainted with so pleasing an art. I approached the church door, found it open, and went in, when I found my ear charmed with some heavenly addition to the sweet melody of music; and on inquiry was told, they were singing in four parts. At the head of them was a Mr. Langham, who could sing in a feigned soprano's voice, and who

[1] One copy of this amiable little chap-book bears below the drawing used as a frontispiece the following couplet:

"Spira by Slavish Feare doth Truth Deny
And sets his trembling hand to Popery."

An edition ascribed to Nhataniel Bacon was published in 1700 with this for a title-page: "A relation of the fearful estate of Francis Spira after he turned apostate from the Protestant church to popery. . . ." On the preliminary leaves thereof are advertised a book by Bunyan for twopence, and for one-and-six a vial of "that famous medicine, called Aqua-anti-Torminalis," which would be of inestimable value "against Gripings of the Guts, Wind-Cholick, or Dry-Belly-Ach."

[2] Newmarket had "two churches belonging to it, and a free school endowed by King Charles." Defoe's *Tour*, ut supra, 2: 86.

was their instructor in music; for they were all acknowledged learners except himself, and each of them paid him five shillings a quarter for his trouble in teaching them. Having stood with delight to listen some time, a conversation at length began, I was invited to try my voice, and after a ready compliance, both my voice and ear were pronounced to be good. Thus encouraged, I ventured to ask if I might come among them; and was answered, yes; they should be very glad to have me, for they much wanted a treble voice, and all they required was that I should conform to the rules of the society.[1] I inquired what those rules were, and was told, they each paid five shillings entrance, and five shillings a quarter to Mr. Langham, another five shillings for Arnold's Psalmody; and that they paid forfeits of pennies and twopences, if they were absent on certain days, at certain hours, or infringed other necessary bye-laws. An expense

[1] "Choral services were certainly not at their best in the eighteenth century. Organs were far from common even in important town churches, and the monotony of the parson and the clerk's nasal duet was relieved by a rendering—it would not be far from the truth to say a murdering—of select portions of Sternhold and Hopkins' bad, or Tate and Brady's worse, rhythmical version of the Psalms of David, by a choir, a motley crew of unruly singers (who occupied a curtained lott in the western gallery) to the accompaniment of discordant fiddles, hautboys, clarionets, trombones, or violincellos." Sydney, *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, 2: 303.

so great alarmed me: I would willingly have complied with their forfeits, because I depended on my own punctuality; but fifteen shillings was a vast sum, and I told them what it was that made me hesitate. As they were desirous to have me, they agreed that I should sing out of their books; and Langham, who had great good-nature, said, since I was but a boy, and my wages could not be great, he would give up the entrance money. It was therefore agreed, that with the payment of five shillings a quarter to Mr. Langham, I should be instructed by him in the art of psalmody.

From the little I that day learned, and from another lesson or two, I obtained a tolerable conception of striking intervals upwards and downwards; such as the third, the fourth, and the remainder of the octave, the chief feature in which I soon understood, but of course I found most difficulty in the third, sixth, and seventh. Previously however to any great progress, I was obliged to purchase Arnold's Psalmody; and studious over this divine treasure, I passed many a forenoon extended in the hay-loft. My chief, and almost my only difficulty, lay in the impenetrable obscurity of such technical words as were not explained either by their own nature, or by the author in other language. I was illiterate, I knew the language of the vulgar well, but little more. Perhaps no words ever puzzled poor mortal more than I was puzzled by the words, *major* and *minor keys*. I think it a duty, which no one who writes an elementary

book ought to neglect, to give a vocabulary of all the words which are not in common use, in the language in which he writes; and to explain them by the simplest terms in that language; or if that cannot be done, by a clear and easy paraphrase. The hours I spent by myself in mastering whatever belonged to notation, and in learning the intervals, occasioned my progress to be so very different from that of the others, that it excited the admiration of them all; and Mr. Langham, the great man whom I then looked up to, declared it was surprising. If any part was out, I heard it immediately, and often struck the note for them, getting the start of Mr. Langham. If he should happen to be absent, he said that I could set them all right; so that by this, and the clearness of my voice, I obtained the nick-name of the sweet singer of Israel.

My quickness at whatever related to reading became so far known, that a man about fifty, who had many years kept a school in Newmarket, made me the offer, if I would become his scholar, to teach me gratis. Thoroughly glad of the opportunity, I thanked him kindly, and instantly complied. The next morning I went to his school, where I saw a number of boys, to whom I was introduced by the master, as one whom they ought to respect. "I'll set him a word of six syllables," said he, "and I'll engage for him that he shall spell it instantly without the least mistake, or without ever perhaps having seen it before. Pray, my boy," said he, "how do you

spell Mahershalalashbas?"[1] The boys first stared at a word of so foreign a sound, and next at the immediate readiness with which I spelled it, though it would be difficult to find a word that could puzzle less: however, since they all wondered at me, it was very natural I should wonder at myself, and that I did most assuredly. The master shewed me the first seat as an honour to his school, where he assured me I might remain as long as he could teach me any thing, and he had by no means the character of ignorance. But, poor gentleman, he had another failing, which I could less pardon; for every afternoon he was to be seen drunk in the streets, and that to such an offensive and shameful degree, that though I was very desirous to gain some little addition to my stock of knowledge, I felt myself so disgraced by my master, that I went but three times to his school.

This plan, however, suggested another. By trade, Mr. Langham was a maker of leather breeches, which were worn through all Newmarket: but he had by some means acquired rather a greater love of knowledge, and more

[1] Usually spelled Maher-shalal-hash-bash. A symbolical name, meaning "spoil speedeth, prey hasteth," given in 735 B.C. to one of Isaiah's sons to signify the approaching downfall of the allied kings, Rezin and Pekah at the hands of the King of Assyria, a prophecy partially fulfilled in the following year and completely in 721 B.C. See in the Old Testament, *Isaiah*, ch. viii, verses 1, 3; and 2 *Kings*, ch. xv, verse 29; ch. xvi, verse 9.

of it than at that period belonged to his station; for I believe he was only a journeyman. Hearing me bewail the opportunity I had lost, and especially that of acquiring the first rudiments of arithmetic, he joined in my regret, saying it was a pity he could not afford to teach me himself for nothing, and that I could not spare another five shillings a quarter out of my wages; otherwise he would have given me one lesson daily between stable-hours. To this proposal, after turning it in my mind, I however agreed. I continued with him three months, and in that time mastered rule after rule so well, as to understand Practice and the Rule of Three. Except what I have already related, these three months, as far as others were concerned, may be truly called my course of education. At the age of two and three and thirty, indeed, when I was endeavouring to acquire the French language, I paid a Monsieur Raymond twenty shillings for a few lessons, but the good he did me was so little that it was money thrown away. At Newmarket I was so intent on studying arithmetic, that for want of better apparatus, I have often got an old nail, and cast up sums on the paling of the stable-yard. The boys prophesied I should go mad; in which sagacious conjecture our old maid and housekeeper, for she was both, joined them.

CHAPTER XVI

WHILE my music and my arithmetic were thus in some sort confusing my brain, I became not only ashamed of, but alarmed at myself; for being occasionally sent on errands, I found my memory absent, and made several blunders, a thing to which I had been wholly unaccustomed. One day, when John Watson was at home, I was sent only for two things, and forgot one of them, at which I heard him exclaim, without any reproach—"God bless me, what is to come to the boy!" This startled me a little. As however I remember nothing more of the paroxysm, it could not have lasted very long.

My father did not continue long at his trade, and was obliged to seek some other mode of subsistence. For some months during the middle part of the time that I remained as a stable-boy, he had the office at an inn of fetching and carrying the Royston mail; and being afterwards tired of this, he quitted Newmarket for London, leaving me once more with much good advice, and no small degree of regret. I loved my father, and knew his intentions were honest: but almost from infancy, I was aware they were not wise.

I suppose that that property of the mind, which creates certain indistinct forms and imaginary lines in the clear and visible appearances of things, is common to every person of a lively and active fancy, for I have it still; and now that I am old, much more in sickness than in health. I recollect an instance of this, which occurred about the time I am speaking of. The cowardly boys made bargains with each other to go in pairs, when their business called them to different parts of the yard and out-houses after it was dark: I determined always to go by myself. One evening, intending to fetch some hay from a hay-loft, as I was mounting the ladder, an object presented itself, that instantly stopped me. It was a clear moon-light night, and I beheld the perfect face of a man extended on the hay. He must be a stranger, and might be a robber, or person of evil intentions. I had no idea of a ghost; and though alarmed, I reasoned on probabilities. The more I looked, the more thoroughly I was convinced I saw a real face. Still I continued to reason. I was half way up the ladder. If I returned, I must either fabricate a falsehood, or openly declare why, and this would have been cause of triumph to those whose actions betrayed their fears, and of the greater disgrace to me for having assumed a superiority. The man might be a beggar, who had only obtained entrance by some means, that he might rest comfortable: and even if his designs were wicked, they could not be against me, for I had little to lose; so that at last I determined to

proceed. As I have said, the light of the moon was bright: it shone into the loft through the holes and crevices of a side hanging door; and I had mounted three steps higher, before the vision totally disappeared, and was replaced by the rude and unmeaning lines of reality. No man was there, consequently no man's face could be seen. This incident was a wholesome lesson: it taught me to think much on the facility with which the senses are deceived, and the folly with which they entertain fear.

The boys, who had paired off as mutual protectors to each other, had left my name-sake Tom, being the odd one, without a mate, and as he was much more remarkable for his cowardice than his valour, the best expedient he could think of was to offer me a half-penny a night if I would go with him in the dark to get his hay. I believe nothing could have made him stir from the fire-side on a winter night, but the fear of neglecting his stable duties, which fear to all of us had something in it that was almost sacred. We had at this time in the stables a very beautiful male tabby cat, as remarkable for his familiarity with the horses and boys, as for his fine colours, symmetry, and strength. He would go through the stable night by night, and place himself on the withers, first of this horse, then of the next, and there familiarly take his sleep, till he had made the whole round. The boys had taught him several tricks, which he very willingly repeated as often as they gave the signal, without taking offence at the rogueries

they occasionally practised upon him; so that he was a general favourite with every one, from John Watson even to Old Betty. One evening as I was going with Tom to get his hay, and we approached the stable in which it happened then to be kept, Tom leading the road (for cowards are always desirous to convince themselves they are really valiant), a very sudden, vehement, and discordant noise was heard; to listen to which, Tom's valour was wholly unequal. Flying from the stable, he was at the back-door of the house in a twinkling. I was paid for my courage: pride and curiosity concurred to make me show it, and I remained firm at my post. I stood still, while the noise at intervals was several times repeated. It was the beginning of winter, and at one end of the stable a certain quantity of autumn wheat was stowed. I recollected this circumstance, and after considering some time, at length the truth struck me, and I called, "Come along, Tom, it is the cat and the rats fighting, but they will leave off when they hear us come into the stable." We had neither candle nor lanthorn. It was a maxim with John Watson to trust no such things with boys, whose nightly duty it was to fetch trusses of straw and armfulls of hay; but I entered the stable, gave Tom his hay, loaded myself with my own, and confident in the valour of our favourite cat, said to him—"We shall find a rare number of dead rats to-morrow, Tom." I knew not the power of numbers, nor the imbecility of an individual so exposed. The next morning we found our

hero lying dead in the stable, with only three dead rats beside him. What the number of the wounded was, must remain a secret to posterity: though of the value of this, and other secrets of the same kind, I have often entertained my doubts.

John Watson remained a bachelor, and old Betty was the only female, at least that I can recollect, in the family: she was very ignorant, and very angry when boys durst contend with her age and experience, but we did not greatly respect her anger. She was so strenuous an advocate for goblins, apparitions, and especially witchcraft, that she did not in the least scruple to affirm things the most extravagant. One of her positions was, that unthinking old women with less courage and sagacity than herself, were taken by surprise, and made witches against their will. Imps of the devil came slily upon them, ran up their clothes, caught some part of the breast in their mouths, and made teat for themselves. She provoked me very much, yet I could not help laughing; while she, to prove the truth of what she said, affirmed, she had seen them peeping out more than once; and that on a certain night, two of them made a desperate attempt on her, which she could no otherwise defeat, than by taking up first one, and then the other, with the tongs, and throwing them both into the red hot part of the kitchen fire.

Stories like these are *almost* too ludicrous to be mentioned, but the one I am going to relate,

was at that time to me as tragical as any thing that could happen to an individual.

Jack Clarke, now about eighteen, was spending his evening before nine o'clock in his good-natured way among the boys of Lord March, who lived opposite. One of them (I forget his name), took down a fowling-piece that was hanging over the kitchen chimney, and playing that trick which has been so repeatedly, and in my opinion so strangely played, said, "Now, Jack, I'll shoot you." As he spoke, he pulled the trigger, and the distance between them being short, Clarke was shot on the left side of his face, the middle half of which immediately became as frightful a wound as perhaps was ever beheld. The lads of both stables were there instantly: the grooms came the moment they could be found, and the terror and distress of the scene were very great, for every body felt kindness for Jack Clarke. Tom Watson was dispatched on horseback to Cambridge in search of all the surgical and medical aid that could be obtained; and such was his speed, that the surgeon, the doctor, and himself, were back by midnight, and the medical men busy in probing, inquiring, and consulting, while poor Clarke lay groaning, extended on the bed of John Watson. The left cheek-bone, eye, and other parts were shattered past hope: the case was thought precarious, there was a bare possibility that the patient, miserable as he was, and shocking to look at, might survive. When the physician and surgeon had done all that they could by dressing

and giving orders. John Watson took them under his care for the night. Whether he found beds and entertainment for them at an inn, or at the house of a friend, I know not; but as I saw him no more, I suppose he remained with them to keep them company, for such scenes do not immediately dispose the mind to sleep. Among ourselves at home, however, a very serious question arose, no less than that of, who should sit up and watch with him all night? His sufferings were so incessant, his groans so terrifying, and the wounds (by which the inside of the head was made visible) had been so bloody, raw, and torn, being at the same time most frightfully spread all round with gun-powder, and black and red spots, that every person present frankly owned they durst not stay alone all night with him in the same chamber. When it was proposed to old Betty, she was in an agony. All the older boys expressed the terror it would give them:—some sleep must be had, and it being winter, the stables were to open before four. What, therefore, could be done? I own I was almost like the rest, but I most truly pitied poor Jack Clarke. I had always felt a kindness for him, and to see him forsaken at so distressing a moment, left by himself in such a wretched state, no one able to foresee what he might want, overcame me, and I said, "Well, since nobody else will, I must!" Besides, by an action so bold, performed by a boy at my age, I gained an undeniable superiority, of which any one of the elder boys would have been proud.—The medical

men remained at Newmarket, or went and came as their business required, while Jack Clarke continued under their hands. I was truly anxious for his cure, though from what I had seen on the first night, and from my ignorance in surgery, I had supposed such a thing impossible. I was therefore surprised that he should seem at first to linger on, that afterwards the wounds should fill up, and assume a less frightful appearance, and that at length a perfect cure should be effected. It was certainly thought to do great honour to Cambridge. The left eye was lost, the appearance of the bones was disfigured, and the deep stain of the gun-powder remained. But before I came away appearances varied, the marks of the gun-powder became less ; and when I left Newmarket, Jack Clarke had been long restored to the stables, where he continued to live, apparently in good health.

CHAPTER XVII

DURING these events and accidents, the trifling studies I might be said to have, were, as far as I had the means, pursued. That is, whenever I could procure a book, I did not fail to read it; I took pains to repeat, that I might well understand my rules in arithmetic; and as for music, Arnold was studied with increasing ardour. But the instructions of Arnold were only vocal: nay, they had a stricter limitation, they were confined to psalmody. Had I possessed any instrument, had I begun to practise, and had the means of obtaining a livelihood suggested themselves in this way, music would, most probably, have been my profession.

Moral remarks do not escape the notice of boys whose minds are active, nor the moral consequences of things, so much perhaps as is supposed. They now and then discover how much they are themselves affected by them; and therefore are not only led to re-consider their own, but begin to ruminate on some of the practices of mankind. For myself, I looked up with delight to angelic purity, and with awful reverence to the sublime attributes of the God-head. The first I considered as scarcely

beyond the attainment of man; the second I considered it as the grand reward of saints and angels to be allowed to comprehend. Towards the future attainment of any such angelic perfection, I could not discover the least tendency in the manners of Newmarket, or the practices of the people around me. When left to themselves, petty vulgar vices, such as their means could afford, were common among them: and at the grand periodical meetings of the place, I heard of nothing but cards, dice, cock-fighting, and gambling to an enormous amount.

One anecdote which John Watson, who was no babbler, told his brother Tom, and which Tom was eager enough to repeat, struck me for its singularity and grandeur; as it appeared to me, who then knew nothing of vast money speculations, and who know but little at present. In addition to matches, plates, and other modes of adventure, that of a sweepstakes had come into vogue: and the opportunity it gave to deep calculators to secure themselves from loss by hedging their bets, greatly multiplied the bettors, and gave uncommon animation to the sweepstakes mode. In one of these, Captain Vernon had entered a colt or filly; and as the prize to be obtained was great, the whole stable was on the alert. It was prophesied that the race would be a severe one; for, though the horses had none of them run before, they were all of the highest breed; that is, their sires and dams were in the first lists of fame. As was foreseen, the contest was indeed a severe one;

for it could not be decided,—it was a dead heat: but our colt was by no means among the first. Yet so adroit was Captain Vernon in hedging his bets, that if one of the two colts that made it a dead heat had beaten, our master would, on that occasion, have won ten thousand pounds: as it was, he lost nothing, nor would in any case have lost any thing. In the language of the turf, he stood ten thousand pounds to nothing.

A fact, so extraordinary to ignorance, and so splendid to poverty, could not pass through a mind like mine without making a strong impression, which the tales told by the boys of the sudden rise of gamblers, their reverses, desperate fortunes, empty pockets at night, and hats full of guineas in the morning, only tended to increase. With my companions I repeated, *Never venture, never win:* and in this state of puerile avarice, I made bets to the amount of more than half my year's wages, the very next day on the race ground, all to be decided within the week. Concerning the event, however, when it was too late, my mind began to misgive me. By each match, on which I had a venture, my fears were increased; for I generally found myself on the wrong side. My crowns and half-crowns were dwindling away; yet in the midst of my despair, I looked with some degree of surprise at myself, and said, "How can these boys with whom I betted, who are so very ignorant, and over whom, even on the turf or in the stable, I feel my own superiority, have

so much more cunning in laying bets than I have?"[1]

Like many of the tragical farces of life, this hastily formed scheme of mine was without a basis, formed on confused suppositions, and ending in total disappointment; for at the end of the week, the loss I had sustained was somewhat either over or under a guinea and a half. To me, who never before had ventured to bet sixpence, who now well remembered that all the good books I had read, held gambling in abhorrence; and who recollected, with unspeakable anguish, that the sin and folly must be told to my father; that, face to face, I must avow what I had done (for how else could I account for the expenditure of money, for which I could find no equivalent?) to me, I say, these were excruciating thoughts, as will be proved by the desperate remedy I attempted. Well was it for me that the races were over, or my little purse would have been wholly emptied. As it was not therefore possible for me to recover my loss in this way, I began to consider whether there was no other, and despair at length suggested another; a wild one it is true, but no one could deny its possibility. The race week was

[1] Defoe, *Tour*, ut supra, 2: 84, rails at the degenerate tricks played by men of honour in connection with betting on the races at Newmarket, alleging bribery of grooms and racing-boys, of which Holcroft makes no mention. Defoe even goes so far as to say that it was not the best horse "that wins a race, but that that was destined for it by a combination."

just over ; thousands of pounds had been betted ; guineas and purses had passed in multitudes, from hand to hand, and pocket to pocket, over a vast area, extending from the chair to the Devil's Ditch, and spreading to I know not what width : might not some stray guinea, nay, perhaps some weighty purse, be now lying there for the fortunate comer ? Or rather, was it not a thing exceedingly likely ? I could not suppose the seeds of this golden fruit to be sown exceedingly thick, or that it would not require a long search : but I must not spare my labour : such good luck might befall me, and so eager was my mind to rid itself of its present anguish, that I was willing to believe I should be successful.

The next morning the horses were no sooner dressed and fed, and the stables cleaned, than I hurried to execute my design. I began it by a most careful examination of the betting chair, round which I slowly walked a number of times, and finding nothing below, mounted, examined its crevices, and after often attempting to go, and as often lingering by some faint endeavour to renew hope, could not quit it at last, but with painful reluctance. Where should I seek next ? The whole heath was before me ; but which was the lucky spot ? Groups of horsemen had assembled here and there : but to find each individual place ? Oh that I had marks by which to discover !—Thus with my eyes fixed on the ground, wandering eagerly in every direction, I slowly paced the ground, wholly intent on the perplexing thoughts and fruitless

pursuits, till increasing disappointment, and inquiry into the time of day, sent me back. The experiment of money-finding on Newmarket heath, might be thought sufficient, but, no! I had an hour in the evening: it was a fine moonlight night, and dejected as I was, I resolved again to try, and forth I went, but it was indeed on the forlorn hope. The incident however forcibly paints the nature of my feelings. I could not endure to confess to my father both my guilt, and evident inferiority in cunning to other boys; and to fabricate a lie, was perhaps equally painful. All that remained was to put off the evil day, and come to my account as late as might be. What I mean will be better understood when it is known I had determined to leave Newmarket, and return to my father, not however without having first consulted him, and gained his approbation. My mind having its own somewhat peculiar bias, circumstances had rather occurred to disgust me, than to invite my stay. I despised my companions for the grossness of their ideas, and the total absence of every pursuit, in which the mind appeared to have any share. It was even with sneers of contempt that they saw me intent on acquiring some small portion of knowledge: so that I was far from having any prompter, either as a friend or a rival. As far as I was concerned with horses, I was pleased; but I saw scarcely a biped, John Watson excepted, in whom I could find any thing to admire.

Having taken my resolution, I had to summon up my courage to give John Watson warning;

not that I in the least suspected he would say any thing more than, very well: but he had been a kind master, had relieved me in the day of my distress, had never imputed faults to me, of which I was not guilty, had fairly waited to give my faculties time to shew themselves, and had rewarded them with no common degree of praise when accident brought them to light. It was therefore painful to leave such a master. With my cap off, and unusual awkwardness in my manner, I went up to him, and he perceiving I was embarrassed, yet had something to say, began thus. "Well, Tom, what is the matter now?"—"Oh, Sir, nothing much is the matter: only I had just a word to say."—"Well, well, don't stand about it; let me hear." "Nay, sir, it is a trifle; I only came to tell you, I think of going to London."—"To London?"—"Yes, Sir, if you please."—"When do you mean to go to London?"—"When my year is up, Sir."—"To London! What the plague has put that whim into your head?"—"I believe you know my father is in London."—"Well, what of that?"—"We have written together, so it is resolved on."—"Have you got a place?"—"I don't want one, Sir, I could not have a better than I have."—"And what are you to do?"—"I can't tell that yet, but I think of being a shoemaker."—"Pshaw, you are a blockhead, and your father is a foolish man."—"He loves me very dearly, Sir; and I love and honour him."—"Yes, yes, I believe you are a good boy, but I tell you, you are both doing a very foolish thing.

Stay at Newmarket, and I will be bound for it, you will make your fortune."—"I would rather go back to my father, Sir, if you please."—"Nay, then, pray take your own way."—So saying, he turned from me with very visible chagrin, at which I felt some surprise: for I did not imagine it would give him the least concern, should any one lad in the stables quit his service.

Spring and summer kept passing away: Arnold continued to afford me difficulties which I continued to overcome: my good-tempered, pleasant friend (for so he was) the breeches-maker, and I, used often to consult together; and his surprise that I should so soon have gone beyond him with respect to the theory of music, not a little flattered me. The honest psalm-singers were told I was about to leave them, and owned they were sorry to hear it, I gave them so much assistance. In short, such friends as a poor boy of fifteen, wholly unrelated in the town could have, all expressed a degree of regret at parting: my stable-companions were the only persons who expressed no emotion one way or the other. I must here, however, except poor Jack Clarke, who, as he was the first that introduced me to Newmarket, so he was the last, of whom I took leave.

END OF MR. HOLCROFT'S NARRATIVE

BOOK II

CHAPTERS ON EARLY OCCUPATIONS

CHAPTER I

AT the expiration of his year, Mr. Holcroft left John Watson and his associates at Newmarket; and returned, as he had intended, to his father, who then kept a cobbler's stall in South Audley Street. He was at this time near sixteen. He continued to work in the stall with his father, till the latter could afford to pay a journey-man shoe-maker, to instruct him in the business of making shoes, which in time he learned so well, as to obtain the best wages.

From his early childhood, however, he had eagerly read whatever books came in his way, and this habit did not now leave him: so that, though an exceedingly quick workman, it was rarely that he had a shilling to spare, except for absolute necessaries; and when he had, it was spent at an old book-stall, and his time was again idled away in reading.—Such was the complaint continually made against him. At nineteen, he travelled to Liverpool with his father, who seems still to have retained his love of wandering, and who was most probably determined in this excursion by a desire to revisit his native country.

This happened in the year 1764: and in the year following, Mr. Holcroft married. While he continued at Liverpool, he procured the humble office of teaching children to read, at a small school in the town.[1] But in less than a year, he left the country, and came to London.[2] Here he continued to work at his trade as a shoemaker, yet gleaning knowledge with all the industry in his power. He had advanced as far as fractions in arithmetic, knew something of geometry, could write a legible hand, and had made himself a complete master of vocal music. But the stooping position required in making shoes brought on a return of his old disorder, the asthma; and as he hated the trade, he made every effort to find out some other employment.

[1] *The Georgian Era, Memoirs of eminent persons. London*, 1834 (3: 385), says, "opened a school in Liverpool"; but it is probably in error as secondary sources are apt to be. Beyond Hazlitt's statement here, which this book used, there seems to be no confirmation. I have found no advertisements or notices in the Liverpool newspapers of the time to indicate that he "opened a school."

[2] John Adolphus, *Memoirs of John Bannister, Comedian* (1: 362), says that Holcroft lodged in a garret on first coming to town. His father remained in Liverpool. *Gore's Liverpool Directory* for 1767 (p. 19) and for 1769 (p. 21) contains the entry, "Holcroft and son, white cooper's, Castle Street." There is no similar evidence for earlier or later years, 1766, 1774, 1777, or 1781, and the Parliamentary Poll Book for 1780 confirms the fact and the date, white cooper from 1767–9.

Mr. Holcroft had, through life, except during the time he was at Newmarket, felt the effects of poverty very severely: but they now preyed more upon his mind than his body. He continually ruminated on the advantages that would have resulted from a good education; and the consciousness that he had neither received one, nor could now pay for instruction, gave him the utmost uneasiness. He was not aware that the desultory materials which he had been at so much pains to collect, would at last form themselves into a consistent mass.

It seems however, that at this period he could not resist the inclination he occasionally felt to commit his thoughts to paper: he even found an editor of a newspaper (the Whitehall Evening Post [1]), who so far approved of his essays,[2] as to pay him five shillings a column for them. One of them was transcribed into the Annual Register: but, according to his own account, it was much too jejune a performance to deserve any such honour. About this time, Mr. Holcroft attempted to set up a day-school somewhere in the country, where for three months he lived upon potatoes and buttermilk, and had but one scholar. At the expiration of the first quarter, he gave up his school, and returned to London. After this, he obtained admission into the family of Mr. Granville Sharpe,[3] with whom

[1] Founded by Daniel Defoe.

[2] Political.

[3] Abolitionist and well-known churchman, cf. a good article in the D.N.B.

he went to reside, partly in the character of a servant, and partly I believe as a secretary. It is not certain whether he was introduced to the notice of this amiable but eccentric man, by his literary efforts, or by accident. Both before and after he went to live with Mr. *Sharpe* he had been accustomed to attend a reading-room, or spouting-club, the members of which in turn rehearsed scenes and passages out of plays.

[There was a house at Cripplegate (The Sign of the Red Lion) where, on a certain night in the week the apprentices of mercers, taylors, grocers, etc., etc., upon depositing the sum of six pence at the bar, received tickets which served as passports to gain them admittance into the frontiers of the muses' territories, vulgarly called the spouting room. It was fortified with paper scenes, canvas doors, and brass knockers in water colours; and it was nothing uncommon to see an apothecary's 'prentice wielding a truncheon, instead of a pestle, and with one turn of his mighty arm, demolish the dome of a church, rend the foundation of a temple, or by an unlucky turn of his heel at his death, bury a whole city in ruins as he fell, to make, as the poet says, "his fall more glorious."[1]]

[1] Extracted from an article by Holcroft in *The Town and Country Magazine*, January, 1779, 11 : 14. Meeting in an upper room over a shop or a public-house, the harmless apprentice, the weigher of figs, and the measurer of ribbon whose soul, nailed like a bad shilling to his master's counter, could not soar as high as declamation —these the underlings of society, gathered together to read flamboyant prologues and shout aloud selected

His master did not think this the best mode of spending his time, and made some attempts to cure him of what he considered an idle habit. These however proved ineffectual, and he was at length dismissed from the house of his patron.

passages from *Every Man in His Humour*, *False Delicacy*, *Thespian Masquerade*, *The Fair Penitent*, *The Mourning Bride*, or *Much Ado About Nothing*. Arthur Murphy's farce, *The Apprentice*, says in the prologue :

> " Thro' all the town this folly you may trace,
> Myself am witness—'tis a common case,"

and proceeds with every lively scene at such an assembly. The following, from this farce, may serve as a definition :

> WINGATE : What's a spouting club ?
>
> GARGLE (*Apothecary*) : A meeting of 'prentices and clerks, and giddy young men, intoxicated with plays ; and so they meet in public-houses to act speeches ; there they all neglect business, despise the advice of their friends, and think of nothing but to become actors.

There is in Holcroft's later novel, *Alwyn, or the Gentleman Comedian* (pp. 29 et seq.), a very amusing episode concerning a spouting club. A master by the name of Seddon is made to enter such a room just as his apprentice, Hilkirk, is reaching towards the door—and consequently into the very face of his master—for the visionary dagger of Macbeth. Whether or not it is actually true, which Hazlitt doubted (C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin : His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 : 125), that Sharpe discovered Holcroft in the same circumstances as Seddon is depicted as discovering Hilkirk, we can at least be sure that Granville Sharpe would have agreed with Seddon that " these societies have an idle, ridiculous, and vicious tendency." It was, then, to a spouting club that

He now found himself once more in the streets of London, without money, without a friend, that shame or pride would suffer him to disclose his wants to, or a habitation of any kind to hide his head in. At last, as he was wandering along wherever his feet led him, his eye accidentally glanced on a printed paper pasted against the wall. This was an invitation to all those spirited young fellows, who chose to make their fortunes as common soldiers in the service of the East India Company.[1] He read it with the greatest satisfaction, and was posting away with all haste to enrol his name in that honourable corps, when he was met by one of the persons, whom he had known at the spouting-club. His companion, seeing his bundle and rueful face, asked him where he was going: to which Holcroft replied, that, had he inquired five minutes sooner,

Holcroft owed not only his reversal of fortune and a new taste of necessitous independence, but also his first introduction to dramatic ideas. For further descriptions, see "A Defence of Spouting Clubs," by E. Colby, in *The Nation* (N.Y.), January 31, 1918, 106: 124–125.

[1] Strangely enough, William Nicholson, later his intimate friend, entered the service of the East India Company in 1769, but I have been able to find no connection, so let it pass as mere coincidence. We should not forget that both Ben Jonson and Thomas Otway had fought in the low countries, or that the runaway son in *The Vicar of Wakefield* was about to join an expedition when a friend met on the street led him into the ranks of the strollers.

he could not have told him, but that, at present, he was for the wars. At this his spouting friend appeared greatly surprised, and told him, he thought he could put him upon a better scheme. He said, one Macklin,[1] a famous London actor, was going over to play in Dublin; that he had been inquiring of him for a young fellow, who had a turn for the stage; and that, if Holcroft pleased, he would introduce him; observing that it would be time enough to carry the knapsack, if the sock did not succeed. This proposal was too agreeable to our adventurer to be heard with inattention. Accordingly, having thanked his acquaintance, and accepted his offer, the next day was fixed upon for his introduction to Macklin. The friend, on whom Holcroft had thus unexpectedly lighted, was, in fact, a kind of scout, employed by Macklin, to pick up young adventurers of promising talents: it being one of this actor's passions to make actors of

[1] Charles Macklin (? 1697–1797). "Man of the World" (1781).—W.-G. Holcroft has used this incident in his novel of *Alwyn*, calling the actor-manager Mac Laughlin. (*Alwyn*, pp. 51 ff.) The London performers were accustomed to absent themselves from town and to make tours of the provinces or of Ireland during the time of the closing of the theatres in London. Macklin made two successive trips to Dublin, in the summers of 1770 and 1771, and it was on the first of these that he took Holcroft along with him. Cf. E. A. Parry, *Charles Macklin*, p. 123; Jas. T. Kirkman, *Memoirs of the Life of Charles Macklin*, 2: 46; R. J. Broadbent, *Annals of the Liverpool Stage*, Liverpool, p. 51.

others; though he was in some respects the worst qualified for the office of any man in the world.

The next morning they proceeded to the place of appointment, when they found the great man seated on his couch, which stood by the fire; and on which, whenever he felt himself tired or drowsy, he went to rest, both day and night; so that he sometimes was not in bed for a fortnight together. As they went in, they were followed by his wife, who brought him a bason of tea and some toast, with each of which he found fifty faults in the rudest manner. He afterwards called to her several times, upon the most frivolous occasions, when she was dignified with the style and title of Bess. His countenance, as it appeared to Mr. Holcroft at this interview, was the most forbidding he had ever beheld; and age, which had deprived him of his teeth, had not added to its softness. After desiring the young candidate to sit down, he eyed him very narrowly for some time, and then asked him, *What had put it into his head to turn actor?* The abruptness of the question disconcerted him; and it was some time before he could answer, in rather a confused manner, that he had *taken it into his head* to suppose it was genius, but that it was very possible he might be mistaken. "Yes," said he, "that's possible enough; and by G——, Sir, you are not the first that I have known so mistaken." Holcroft smiled at his satire, and the other grinned ghastly with his leathern lips, for our tyro had not added to

the beauty of his visage by repeating his words.[1] While Macklin was drinking his tea, they talked on indifferent subjects; and as Holcroft did not happen to differ with him, but on the contrary had opportunities of saying several things which confirmed his opinions, he was pleased to allow that he had the appearance of an ingenious young man. When his beverage was finished, he desired him to speak a speech out of some play, which being done, he remarked that he had never in his life heard a young spouter speak naturally, and therefore he was not surprised that Holcroft did not: but, as he seemed tractable, and willing to learn, if he would call again on the morrow, he would hear and answer him further.

When they had descended into the street, Holcroft's companion assured him *it would do*, for that he had met with a very favourable reception; which was indeed the case, considering the character of the person to whom their visit had been paid.

According to the account Mr. Holcroft has left of this extraordinary man, the author of the comedy of the Man of the World, he was born in the century before the last, yet at the time of Mr. Holcroft's application to him (which was

[1] "Though his manners, as a companion, are somewhat tinctured with the acrimoniousness of old age, his conversation is nervous, and his reasoning persuasive." John Williams (Anthony Pasquin), *Children of Thespis*, Second Part, 1787, note on Macklin.

in the year 1770) his faculties did not seem in the least impaired. He was said to have been bred in the interior parts of Ireland, and in such utter ignorance, as not to be able to read at the age of forty. The progress, therefore, which he made afterwards, was an astonishing proof of his genius and industry. His body, like his mind, was cast in a mould as rough as it was durable. His aspect and address confounded his inferiors; and the delight he took in making others fear and admire him gave him an aversion to the society of those whose knowledge exceeded his own; nor was he ever heard to acknowledge superiority in any man. He had no respect for the modesty of youth or sex, but would say the most discouraging, as well as grossest things; and felt pleasure in proportion to the pain he gave. It was common with him to ask his pupils, why they did not rather think of becoming bricklayers than players. He was impatient of contradiction to an extreme; and when he found fault, if the person attempted to answer, he stopped him without hearing, by saying, "Ha, you have always a reason for being in the wrong!" This impatience carried him still farther; it often rendered him exceedingly abusive. He could pronounce the words, *scoundrel*, *fool*, *block-head*, familiarly, without the least annoyance to his nervous system. He indeed pretended to the strictest impartiality, and while his passions were unconcerned, often preserved it: but these were so extremely irritable, that the least opposition was construed into an unpardonable insult;

and the want of immediate apprehension in his pupils subjected them to the most galling contempt, which excited despair instead of emulation. His authority was too severe a climate for the tender plant of genius ever to thrive in. His judgment was, however, in general sound, and his instructions those of a master. "In short," says Mr. H., "if I may estimate the sensations of others by my own, those despots, who, as we are told, shoot their attendants for their diversion, are not regarded with more awe than Macklin was by his pupils and domestics." Such is the conclusion of his severe, but apparently faithful portrait of this singular character; and it will be seen in the sequel, that he had sufficient opportunity for rendering it accurate.

Having finished their visit, Holcroft and his friend adjourned to the Black Lion, in Russell Street, which was at that time a place of resort for theatrical people. He here learnt that Mr. Foote [1] was going to take a company to

[1] Samuel Foote (1720–77). The actor, manager, and playwright. Author of many successful farces. At this time manager of the Haymarket, which played in London during the summer intervals of the licensed theatres. Holcroft wrote one of his *Elegies* (1777) on the death of Foote. Many years later, in *The Theatrical Recorder* (April, 1805) Holcroft said: "Since the time of Shakespeare, perhaps no Englishman, as actor and poet, has received such great and such frequent applause as the late Samuel Foote: he was indeed the Moliere of his age. His theatre was upon a small scale, and it was rather his delight to give an exquisite sketch than a

Edinburgh, after the close of the summer season. Being now anxious to secure himself an engagement, and the manner of Macklin having neither prejudiced him much in his favour, nor given him any certain hopes of success, he resolved to apply to Mr. Foote. Accordingly, making some slight excuse to his companion, he hastened into Suffolk Street.

He had the good fortune to find the manager at breakfast with a young man, whom he employed partly on the stage, and partly as an amanuensis. "Well," said he, "young gentleman, I guess your business by the sheepishness of your manner; you have got the theatrical cacoethes, you have rubbed your shoulder against the scene: hey, is it not so?" Holcroft answered that it was. "Well, and what great hero should you wish to personate? Hamlet, or Richard, or Othello, or who?" Holcroft replied, that he distrusted his capacity for performing any that he had mentioned. "Indeed," said he, "that's a wonderful sign of grace. I have been teazed for these many years by all the spouters in London, of which honourable fraternity I dare say you are a member; for I can perceive no stage varnish, none of your true strolling brass lacker on your face."—"No indeed, Sir."—

complete comedy: yet many of his pieces show how perfectly he was qualified for that difficult task, but that the nature of circumstances, and perhaps his love of pleasant society, of which he was the soul, enured him to negligent habits."

"I thought so. Well, Sir, I never saw a spouter before that did not want to surprise the town in Pierre, or Lothario,[1] or some character that demands all the address, and every requisite of a master in the art. But, come, give us a touch of your quality; a speech: here's a youngster," pointing to his secretary, "will roar Jaffier against Pierre, let the loudest take both." Accordingly, he held the book, and at it they fell: the scene they chose, was that of the before-mentioned characters in Venice Preserved. For a little while after they began, it seems that Holcroft took the hint Foote had thrown out, and restrained his wrath: but this appeared so insipid, and the ideas of rant and excellence were so strongly connected in his mind, that when Jaffier began to exalt his voice, he could no longer contain himself; but, as Nic. Bottom says, they both roared so, that it would have done your heart good to hear them. Foote smiled, and after enduring this vigorous attack upon his organs of hearing as long as he was able, interrupted them.

Far from discouraging our new beginner, he told him, that with respect to giving the meaning of the words, he spoke much more correctly than he had expected. "But," said he, "like other novices, you seem to imagine that all excellence lies in the lungs: whereas such violent exertions should be used but very sparingly, and upon

[1] In "Venice Preserved" and "The Fair Penitent," both frequently played at this period.

extraordinary occasion; for (besides that these two gentlemen, instead of straining their throats, are supposed to be in common conversation) if an actor make no reserve of his powers, how is he to rise according to the tone of the passion?" He then read the scene they had rehearsed, and with so much propriety and ease, as well as force, that Holcroft was surprised, having hitherto supposed the risible faculties to be the only ones over which he had any great power.

Mr. Holcroft afterwards displayed his musical talents, which also met with the approbation of Foote; who, however, told him, that as he was entirely inexperienced with respect to the stage, if he engaged him, his salary at first would be very low. He said, it was impossible to judge with certainty of stage requisites, till they had been proved; and that if, upon consideration he thought it expedient to accept of one pound per week, he might come to him again a day or two before the theatre in the Haymarket shut up; but that if he could meet with a more flattering offer in the mean time, he begged he might be no obstacle.[1]

[1] The usual way of securing recruits for these companies is described by S. W. Ryley in *The Itinerant*, 4: 144, in the following words: "In passion week, all the managers who wanted people and all the actors who wanted employment assembled in London. Managers; first those dignified persons who governed theatres royal; next these who presided over theatres by licence; and lastly, the humble purveyors for public amusement whose ambition soared not beyond that appendage to

Mr. Holcroft came away from this celebrated wit, delighted with the ease and frankness of his behaviour, and elated with his prospect of success. But as he had promised Macklin to call again, he did not think it right to fail in his engagement. Accordingly, on his second visit, he gave him a part to read in a piece of which he himself was the author, and which had met with great success. Having finished this task apparently to the satisfaction of the author, the latter paid his visitor so high a compliment, as to read to him some scenes of a comedy, which he was then writing. They were characteristic and satirical, and met with Holcroft's sincere and hearty approbation, which, it may be supposed, did not a little contribute to prejudice Macklin in his favour. He, however, thought himself bound not to act with duplicity; and he therefore told Macklin of the offer he had had from Foote, excusing this second application from the necessity he was under of getting immediate employment. Macklin allowed the force of his excuse, but thought he might do better in Ireland. He inquired if Holcroft had any objection to become a prompter, adding that the office was profitable, and one, for which, from the good hand he

agriculture—a Barn. The Actors were not less diversified than the managers. Some were dressed in the first stile of fashion; others barely clean and decent; and a third class neither one nor the other." See also Alwin Thayer, "Strolling Players and Provincial Drama after Shakspere," in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, June, 1922, 37: 243–80.

wrote, and other circumstances, he might easily qualify himself. Holcroft answered that Macklin was the best judge of his fitness for the office, and that he had no objection to the situation, except that it would be more agreeable to his inclination to become an actor. This inclination the other said might be indulged at the same time, which would render him so much the more useful. Little parts would frequently be wanting; the going on for these would accustom him to face the audience, and tread the stage, which would be an advantage. Holcroft then demanded what salary would be annexed to his office; and received for answer, that, as there was a good deal of trouble in it, he could not have less than thirty shillings a week, especially if he undertook to perform small parts occasionally. Macklin also informed him, that he was not manager himself, he only went as a performer: but that Mr.——,[1] one of the managers, was in town, to whom he would speak, and in two or three days return him a positive answer. In the interim he desired his *protégé* to call in the morning, and he would give him instructions in the part he had read to him, for he had some thoughts of letting him play it. After making proper acknowledgements for these favours, our young adventurer took his leave, much better pleased than at his first visit.

[1] Probably Dawson. Cf. p. 135.

CHAPTER II

IT was not long before every thing was settled in the manner proposed by Macklin, and Mr. Holcroft was informed, that it was necessary for him to set off for Dublin, it being the intention of the proprietors to open the theatre about the beginning of October. In consequence of the desire he had expressed to appear in some character, Macklin had promised not only to procure him such an opportunity, but likewise to instruct and become his patron: and on Holcroft's representing to him his want of cash for the journey, he lent him six guineas on the part of the managers, and gave him a letter to Mr. *Dawson*,[1] who would, he said, provide him with a lodging, and do him other trifling services, which would be agreeable to a person in his situation.

Holcroft now rewarded his spouting friend with a guinea, redeemed his clothes, which he had been forced to pawn, and left London, elated with the most flattering hopes.—He arrived in Dublin about the latter end of September, 1770. The novelty of the scene, and the vast difference in the economy and manners

[1] See page 135.

of the people, made a strong impression on his imagination. The bar at the mouth of the Liffy renders the entrance up that river passable only to ships of small burthen, and to them only when the tide serves. It was low water when the packet arrived at the mouth of the river, and a boat came alongside of the vessel, into which most of the passengers went, rather than wait another tide, and our adventurer among the rest. The river divides the city, and the other passengers were set on shore on the quay; but Holcroft, as directed by his letter, inquired for Capel-Street, which was on the opposite side. Thither, accordingly, he was carried; and his trunk and himself landed in a beer-house. He was rather astonished, when the watermen demanded five and fivepence, together with a quart of three-penny, for his conveyance from the packet: and the more so, as he had seen the other passengers give but a shilling each, and one or two of the meaner among them only six-pence. He remonstrated against the imposition and quoted the precedent of the shilling; but in vain.

The disorder of their looks, the smoothness of their tongues, and the possession they had taken of his trunk, on which one of them seated himself, while the other argued the case, induced our novice to comply with their demands: but what gave him the greatest astonishment was, that the landlord of the beer-house, who had sworn stoutly to their honesty, while he was paying them, no sooner saw their backs turned,

than, according to his own phraseology, "he pitched them to the *divel*, for a couple of cut-throat, *chating* rascals, that *desarved* hanging worse than a murderer."

The reflections to which this and similar scenes gave rise in Mr. Holcroft's mind, though trite, are not the less worthy of attention. He says, "During my short stay in Ireland, I had but too many occasions to observe a shocking depravity of manners, which I attribute either to the laws, or the want of a due enforcement of them. The Irish are habitually, not naturally licentious. They have all that warmth and generosity which are the characteristics of the best dispositions; and when properly educated are an honour to mankind. Ireland has produced many first-rate geniuses; and in my opinion, nothing but the foregoing circumstance has prevented her from producing many more. It is the legislature which forms the manners of a nation."

When our traveller set out from London, he was assured that the house would open in the beginning of October, but it was November before the season commenced; so that his finances were once more exhausted, and he was obliged to apply to the friend to whom Macklin had recommended him, for a further supply. The acting manager was one *Dawson*,[1] a busy,

[1] Cf. Genest, *The English Stage*, 10: 508. The fact that this man engaged Macklin, and Macklin Holcroft, will perhaps account for the misunderstanding. In the

bustling fellow, void of all civility, who pretended to carry the world before him.

Mr. Holcroft soon discovered that there was an insurmountable antipathy between this man's disposition and his own. But the means of his subsistence were at stake; he endeavoured, therefore, to accommodate himself to the other's temper as much as possible, and waited for the arrival of Macklin with the utmost impatience. He understood that his engagement had been permanently fixed at thirty shillings a week: but, when he went to the treasury, he found it reduced to a guinea; and whenever he pleaded his engagement, received the most mortifying insulting answers. He discovered the entire improbability of his becoming a favourite. None were such but those who could administer the grossest flattery, and who industriously listened to whatever was said in the theatre concerning this petty despot and his management, in order to repeat it in the ear of their employer.

Holcroft had vainly imagined that the presence of Macklin would put an end to all his grievances: he looked up to him as his patron, as one who had been the occasion of his leaving England, who

text additions made by the present editor in the filling out of names for the initials which stand, are indicated in italics.

It was in 1771 that Thackeray's "Barry Lyndon" arrived in Dublin after his notorious, or as he would call them, "famous," adventures on the Continent, and saw where "the roystering, noisy university students gave the law at the Crow Street Theatre."

had pledged himself to be his friend, and was bound to protect him. Whether *Dawson* had prejudiced him against Holcroft, or whether Macklin himself was aware of his deficiency in the honeyed arts of adulation, he could not determine; but he found him very cold in his interest, and far more disposed to browbeat than countenance him. He had, as we have seen, promised to teach him a part, and bring him out in it; but when he ventured to remind him of it, he received only sarcastic remarks on his incapacity. Holcroft, however, persisted in asserting the positiveness of his agreement with respect to his salary, concerning which Macklin had the meanness to equivocate; but he succeeded in obtaining an addition of four shillings a week.

Unable to extricate himself, he endured the insults of malice and ignorance for five months, till the money which he had borrowed had been deducted from his stipend, and then *Dawson* immediately discharged him. It would be no easy task to describe what he must have felt at this moment: he was not possessed of five shillings in the world, was in a strange country, and had no means, now that he was shut out from the theatre, of obtaining a livelihood. He saw nothing but misery and famine before him, and he uttered the bitterest exclamations against Macklin for the perfidiousness of his conduct. This he felt so strongly, that though Macklin by the severity of his manner had gained an almost entire ascendancy over him, he went

to his house, and with the utmost firmness, after observing that he would rather starve than incur any farther obligations to him, displayed the impropriety and injustice of his conduct in such animated terms, that all his wonted sternness fled, and the cynic stood abashed before the boy.[1]

There was another theatre open in Smock-Alley, under the direction of Mossop: but he was insolvent, and none of his people were paid.[2] Here, however, as a last resource, Holcroft applied, and was engaged at the same nominal salary that he had in Capel-Street.

It soon appeared that there was no probability of his being paid for his performance at Mossop's

[1] The fact that Holcroft spoke his mind freely, but did not harbour a grudge, is seen by the high praise he bestowed on Macklin's plays, when, years later, he came to comment upon them in *The Monthly Review*, August, 1793 (11 : 414).

[2] Henry Mossop (? –1773). An actor with obvious weaknesses, severely castigated in Churchill's *Rosciad* (ll. 875–90), but of real ability. His Richard the Third was surpassed in his day only by Garrick's. "To be second to such an actor as Garrick, was to stand in no inconsiderable line of praise; and that Mossop did so, was evident from his performing the part alternately with this great original for some seasons." (Notes to *The Rosciad*, Aldine ed., p. 88.) Under the patronage of some titled ladies he formed a company at the theatre in Smock Alley. After struggling in vain for seven or eight years, with a variety of difficulties, and being reduced at last to absolute bankruptcy, he left Ireland, and arrived in London not a little impaired in health, to die of a broken heart. (*Ibid.*, p. 89.)

theatre:[1] he was therefore forced to quit Dublin, and went on board the Packet for Parkgate, in March, 1771.

The wind was fair till they had lost sight of the hill of Hoath; but soon after sun-set, a hurricane came on, which in this narrow and rocky sea, put their lives in imminent danger. Of this, however, from the violent effects of the sea-sickness, Holcroft was insensible. They were driven during the storm, considerably to the north; and such was the ignorance of the master and his two or three superannuated mariners, that he still continued sailing to the northward, having no knowledge of navigation, but what he had gained by coasting between the two kingdoms. He was therefore on the present occasion quite at a loss; so that in all probability they might have made a voyage to Greenland, had not an intelligent Scotchman among the passengers known some of the headlands in his own country. The master would have contested the point, but that the passengers perceived his want of skill, and joined the North-Briton, who with a degree of warmth expressive of his attachment to his bleak hills, exclaimed, "What the de'el, mon, d'y think I dinna ken the craig of Ailsa?"

They were eight days without putting into any port, except sending the boat on shore on the evening of the seventh at the Isle of Man, to procure some provisions for the passengers, who

[1] Hitchcock's *Irish Stage* and Genest (Vol. X) give good accounts of the vicissitudes of Dublin managers.

were almost starving, having consumed the stock, which is usually provided for voyages of this kind, in a day or two after the storm had abated. The reason of their being kept so long from port was the dead calm which had succeeded; and which the mariners, who are the most superstitious of all beings, attributed to there being some Jonas on board. This opinion they inculcated among the poor Irish who had paid half a crown for their passage in the hold; who were as ignorant as themselves, and much more mischievous. Unluckily, Holcroft was the person on whom their suspicions lighted. They had discovered him to be a player, a profession, which was at one time regarded by the universal consent of mankind as altogether *profane*. The common Irish in the hold were chiefly catholics, and the sixth day from their departure happened to be Easter-Sunday. Holcroft had sauntered off the quarter-deck, with a volume of Hudibras in his hand, and had walked to the other end of the vessel, when he found himself encircled by two or three fellows with most ferocious countenances, who were gazing earnestly at him, with looks expressive of loathing and revenge. Most of the passengers were at breakfast, and there was no one on deck but these men, and a couple of the sailors, who joined them. The peculiarity of their manner excited his notice, and one of them asked him, his lips quivering with rage, "If he had not better be getting a prayer-book, than be reading plays upon that blessed day?" Holcroft now perceived that the fellows were

inebriated, and very imprudently, instead of soothing them, asked them if they imagined there was as much harm in reading a play as in getting drunk on that day, and so early in the morning. "By the holy father," replied the spokesman, "I know you. You are the Jonas, and by Jasus the ship will never see land till you are tossed over-board, you and your plays along with you: and sure it will be a great deal better that such a wicked wretch as you should go to the bottom, than that all the poor innocent souls in the ship should be lost." This speech entirely disconcerted him. The fellow's resolute tone, and the approbation which his companions discovered, were alarming. He, however, preserved presence of mind enough to assure them, it was not a play-book that he was reading, and opened it to convince them, while he slunk away to the quarter-deck, which he gained not without the greatest difficulty. Mr. Holcroft arrived at Chester without any farther accident.

CHAPTER III

MR. HOLCROFT had now the world once more before him; and he resolved to write to such travelling companies as he could obtain any intelligence of. His knowledge of music, his talents as a singer, and his recent arrival from the Dublin theatre, were recommendations which procured him the offer of several engagements. He closed with one, in a company that was then at Leeds in Yorkshire. In this his evil fortune was again predominant. He found the affairs of the company in a state of the greatest disorder: the players were despised in the town, and quarrelling with one another and the manager. Here, however, he discovered how necessary practice is to the profession of a player; and perceived that, though some of his new associates could scarcely read, they could all, from the mere force of habit, speak better on the stage than he could.

In a few weeks, in consequence of continual bickerings and jealousies, most of the players deserted the manager; and no others coming to supply their places, the company dissolved of itself. A letter had followed our luckless hero from Chester, inviting him to join another

set of actors, then at Hereford: but this had been written nearly a month; it was a hundred and sixty miles across the country,[1] and he did not know, if he set out, whether he should find them there; or if he did, whether they might now stand in need of his assistance. But his money was by this time reduced so low, that it was necessary to come to an immediate determination. With a heavy heart, then, and a light purse, did he begin another journey: and on the fifth day, entered an inn by the road-side, which was eight-and-twenty miles from Hereford, with the sum of nine-pence in his pocket; and in the morning made his exit pennyless. The fatigue he had already undergone, and the scanty fare he had allowed himself, had so reduced his spirits, that he found considerable difficulty in performing this last day's journey on an empty stomach: but there was no remedy.

[1] Walking was no special privilege or condition of the actor in search of a new place. Walking from town to town, through rain and mud, was a means of travelling characteristic of the strolling profession. The documentary record of a strolling company, account book and all, commences with a summary of the most likely villages in the projected itinerary—and the distances to be walked between. British Museum, *Add. MSS.*, 33: 488, fol. 3. The present editor has printed, and made some comments on, these records in *Notes and Queries*, 11 Dec., 1915 (11 S. xii, pp. 454–7). See also the article by Alwin Thayer on "Provincial Drama after Shakespeare" in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, June, 1922, 37: 243–80.

About four o'clock he ascended the hill that looks down upon that ancient city, at the sight of which a thousand anxieties took possession of his bosom. He inquired of the first person he met, with an emotion not easily to be expressed, if the comedians had left Hereford; and to his great joy, was answered that they had not. Faint, weary, and ready to drop with hunger, he traversed the town to inquire for the manager: but it was one of the nights on which they did not perform, and the manager was not to be found. He was then directed to his brother, who was a barber in the place[1]; and upon the family's observing his weakness, and desiring to know if he was not well, he collected courage enough to tell them that he was greatly fatigued, having come a long journey, and for the last day not having broken his fast, except at the brook. Notwithstanding this confession, in making which he had evidently done great violence to his feelings, they heard it without offering him the least refreshment, or so much as testifying either surprise or pity; and he left the house with tears in his eyes. When the players understood that a fresh member was come to join them, they, from sympathy, very soon discovered his situation; and were not a little incensed at the story of the barber.

The company into which Mr. Holcroft was

[1] Percy Fitzgerald, in *The Kembles* (London, n.d.), depends almost wholly on this passage of Holcroft's for a survey of the activities of Roger Kemble's company. He suspects that the barber was an actor.

now introduced was that of the Kembles: the father of Mrs. Siddons was the manager. Mr. Holcroft continued with this company some time; and in the course of their peregrinations he visited Ludlow, Worcester, Leominster, Bewdly, Bromsgrove, and Droitwich; in all which places he acted inferior parts.[1] One of the actors in this company, of the name of Downing or Dunning,[2] seems to have made a pretty strong impression on Mr. Holcroft's fancy, for he has left a very particular description of him. This stage-hero had a large, red, bottle-nose, with little intellect; but he was tall, looked passably when made up for the stage, and had a tolerable voice, though monotonous. To hide the redness of his nose, it was his custom to powder it: but unluckily he drank brandy; the humour that flowed to his nose, made it irritable, and in the course of a scene the powder was usually rubbed off. His wife stood behind the scenes with the powder-puff ready, and exclaimed when he came off—"Lord! Curse it, George! how you rub your poor nose! Come here, and let me powder it. Do you think

[1] John Williams' (Anthony Pasquin's) *Children of Thespis*, note on Kemble, lists the following towns on the circuit of this, Roger Kemble's, company: Ludlow, Monmouth, Swansea, Hereford, Gloucester, and Wolverhampton.

[2] Waller-Glover suggests George Downing (d. 1780), who wrote the comedy, *Newmarket, or the Humours of the Turf* (1763), but there is no reason to suggest that this playwright was Holcroft's man of little intellect.

Alexander the Great had such a nose? I am sure Juliet would never have married Romeo with such a bottle-nose. Upon my word, if your nose had been so red, and large, when you ran away with me from the boarding-school, I should never have stepped into the same chaise with you and your journeyman captain, I assure you." George seldom made any reply to these harangues, except "Pshaw, woman," or by beginning to repeat his part.

In the year 1798, when Mr. Holcroft spent an evening with old Mrs. Kemble, and talked over past times with her, she gave a whimsical picture of this wife of Downing. Mrs. Downing was addicted to drinking, exceedingly nervous, and snuffled when she spoke. She used to tell her own story as follows: "He calls himself Downing, Ma'am, but his name is Dunning. I was a quaker, Ma'am, when he first knew me, and put to a boarding-school. He and one Chalmers (I suppose you have heard of that Chalmers, he gave himself the title of Captain)—Well, Ma'am, while I was at the boarding-school, they came a courting to me. Dunning, my husband, that you see there, was a tall, handsome fellow enough; he had not such a bottle nose then, Ma'am, nor such spindle legs; so he put on a coat edged with gold lace, I don't know where he got it, and gave himself the airs of a gentleman. He thought I was a great fortune; but, God help me, I had not a shilling; and I believed him to be what he pretended, when all the while he was no better than a barber; and this

Captain Chalmers was his journeyman. So they persuaded me, innocent fool, to run away with them, thinking they had got a prize, and I thought the same; so the biter on both sides was bit. So that is the history, Ma'am, of me and Mr. Dunning."

This maudlin lady was often employed to receive the money at the play-house door, and was suspected of petty embezzlements to supply herself with liquor. Mr. Holcroft used sometimes to rally her a little unmercifully on her love of the bottle, and the adventure of the Captain. The dialogue is somewhat coarse, but it may serve as a sample of the tone of conversation which prevailed in provincial companies at that time. "It is very cold to night, Mrs. Downing."—"Yes, sir,"—"I hope you take care to keep yourself warm."—"What do you mean, sir?"—"Flannel and a little comfort."—"What comfort, sir!"—"You know what I mean."—"I know nothing about you, sir!"—"A drop of cordial; lamb's wool[1] is a good lining."—"Gods curse your linings, sir; I know nothing about linings."—"Nay, don't be angry; I have not said you are tipsy."—"Gods curse your sayings, sir, I don't care for your sayings. Mr. Downing shall never set foot, after this night, on the same boards with such an impertinent puppy."—"Nay, my dear Mrs. Downing."—"Yes, sir, you are no better; and if George Downing was a man, he would soon teach you good manners."—"He is well qualified, my dear

[1] A drink of the time.—W.-G.

Mrs. Downing, for he practised upon many a block-head before he came to mine."—"And what of that, sir. I understand you; but a barber is as good as a cobbler at any time."

Now it must be allowed, that though there is not much wit or humour in all this, it is very easy and free spoken. Mr. Holcroft was young at the time, and probably ready enough to give in to any joke, which he found the common practice of the place.—It may be remarked by the way, that there is a peculiar tone of banter and irony, bordering on ribaldry, which seems almost inseparable from the profession of strolling players. For this many reasons might be given: 1. The contempt (often most undeserved, no doubt) in which they are held by the world, and which they naturally reflect back on one another; for they must soon learn to despise a profession which they see despised by every one else, at least with that single exception which self-love contrives to reserve for us all. 2. The circumstance that they live by repeating the wit of others, and that they must naturally ape what they live by. In nine instances out of ten, however, this habitual temptation must produce impertinence instead of wit. 3. The custom of repeating things without meaning or consequence *on* the stage, must lead to the same freedom of speech when they are *off*. It is only acting a part. 4. They have not much else to do, and they assume a certain levity of manner as a resource against *ennui*, as well as to hide a sense of the mortifications and hardships they so often meet

with. Lastly, their mode of life, which is always in companies, and in situations where they have an opportunity of becoming acquainted every moment with one another's weak sides, gives rise to a propensity to *quizzing*, as it does in all other open societies ; such as of boys at school, of collegians, among lawyers, etc.—But to return to our narrative.

The company of which old Mr. Kemble was the manager, was more respectable than many other companies of strolling players ; but it was not in so flourishing a condition as to place the manager beyond the reach of the immediate smiles or frowns of fortune. Of this the following anecdote may be cited as an instance. A benefit had been fixed for some of the family, in which Miss Kemble, then a little girl, was to come forward in some part, as a juvenile prodigy. The taste of the audience was not, it seems, so accommodating as in the present day, and the extreme youth of the performer disposed the gallery to noise and uproar instead of admiration. Their turbulent dissatisfaction quite disconcerted the child, and she was retiring bashfully from the stage, when her mother, who was a woman of a high spirit, and alarmed for the success of her little actress, came forward, and leading the child to the front of the house, made her repeat the fable of the Boys and the Frogs, which entirely turned the tide of popular opinion in her favour. What must the feelings of the same mother have been, when this child (afterwards Mrs. Siddons), became the admiration of the

whole kingdom, the first seeing of whom was an event in every person's life never to be forgotten!

It may not be improper to remark in this place, that Mrs. Siddons first appeared in London about the year 1778, without exciting any great notice or expectation. She had acquired her fame in the country, before she was received in 1783 with such unbounded applause on the London theatres. There is a playful and lively letter from Mr. Holcroft to Miss Kemble (most probably Mrs. Siddons), dated, 12th February, 1779, returning her thanks for the favour of her late visit to him while in town, and desiring his remembrances to theatrical friends in the country, and among others, his *Baises Mains* to a Mr. Davis.[1]

A difference with the manager (old Mr. Kemble) occasioned Mr. Holcroft to leave this company; from which he went to that of Stanton,[2] which performed at Birmingham and in the neighbourhood, and sometimes made

[1] There are extant few letters to or from Mrs. Siddons, and this does not seem to be among them.

[2] Speaking of the versatility of Mr. Stanton, one-time manager of the Stafford Theatre, Holcroft later said in *The Theatrical Recorder* (November, 1805): "I have seen him, after printing his own playbills, taking money at the door of the theatre; shortly after that he appeared in the character of Sir George Airy; and between the acts of the play took the lead in the orchestra: in the farce he amused us as Hob in the Well, and at intervals was actively employed as scene shifter, lamp-dresser, and prompter."

excursions to the north of England. A memorandum of Mr. Holcroft, dated 1799, gives some account of himself, and of one of his fellow-actors while in this company. "A person called on me of the name of F——, who began by asking if I knew him. I answered no. He replied that it was likely enough, but that we had been acquainted when I was an actor in Walsal, where he played the second fiddle and doubted not but I should remember that we had often played at billiards together. I answered that I recollected nothing of his person, though I played at billiards with several people, and probably with him. I then asked, which was the best player of the two? He replied that, because he squinted, people thought he could not play; but that, to the best of his recollection, he had won six or seven pounds of me, which greatly distressed me. Yes, said I, the loss of such a sum at that time (in 1773), would have so distressed me, that though I do forget multitudes of things and persons, I think I should not have forgotten such an incident. I was therefore persuaded he was much mistaken in the sum. In answer to this, he said, he had remarked to me at the time we were both upon the same *lay*; and finding I took offence at the expression, he had softened it by saying, we neither of us *wished to lose our money*. He therefore proposed that I should pay him by going halves with him, when he played and betted again. What degree of truth there was in all this, I cannot now exactly tell, only I know that I had a high spirit,

and a detestation of all gambling conspiracies, though at that time I played for money and wished to win. I was poor, neither did I then conceive it to be wrong. The man said, he should not have taken the liberty to come to a gentleman *so high in the world* (at this I could not but smile), as I now was, had not Mr. Clementi[1] told him I was without pride, and entirely free of access. He is a stout man, nearly six feet high, and lives at Birmingham, where he teaches the violin, has daughters, whom he has taught to fiddle, play the harpsichord, &c., and sells music among his scholars. His business in London, he tells me, is to bring up his wife and daughters, and leave them here, the latter for instruction; and that one great motive for visiting me was, to hear Fanny (Miss Holcroft) play. In addition to ungainly size, awkwardness, and squinting, he had a clownish gesticulation, and makes such strange contortions of face, as, were it not to avoid giving offence, would excite continual laughter. In talking of billiards, he spoke of a gentleman at Walsal, with whom he used to play, who came with his pockets full of guineas, and that the chinking of these excited in him the most extraordinary desire to win. Here he got up, and gave a picture by gesticulating, squinting, and drawing his muscles awry,

[1] Muzio Clementi (1752–1832), the father of pianoforte music.—W.-G. He and Holcroft saw much of one another in later years. Cf. the *Diary*, Vol. II, p. 221. To him Holcroft dedicated *A Tale of Mystery* as a "contemporary and intimate."

of the agitation he used to be in when going to strike the balls. Nothing could exceed the effect of his *naïveté*. The conclusion of his history of Walsal was, that playing at billiards with Stanton, the manager, the latter complained of the largeness of the pockets; to which F—— replied, yes, they were very large, large indeed, as unconscionably large as his four dead shares, added to the five shares he received for the acting of his wife and children; which so affronted Stanton, that he discharged him the next week. He said he left Walsal with thirty pounds in his pocket, which he had won at billiards, promising his wife never to play more, and that he had kept his word. As he appeared to have been the industrious father of a family, I invited him to bring his daughters, and hear Fanny, who did not then happen to be at home; but his left-handed country breeding, or some other motive, made him decline fixing any time."[1]

To enable the reader to understand the satirical allusion to the manager's shares, which cost poor F—— his situation as second fiddler in the company, it may be necessary to give a short account of the economy of a provincial theatre. This I cannot do better than by citing Mr. Holcroft's own words. "A company of travelling comedians then is a small kingdom, of which the manager is the monarch. Their code

[1] One Keys who was also a contemporary of Mr. H. in Stanton's company, and has since been a dancing-master, was the father of Mrs. Mills, who played the Spoiled Child, Sophia, in *The Road to Ruin*, &c.—Hazlitt

of laws seems to have existed with few material variations since the days of Shakespeare, who is, with great reason, the god of their idolatry.—The person who is rich enough to furnish a wardrobe and scenes, commences manager, and has his privileges accordingly:[1] if there are twenty persons in the company, for instance, the manager included, the receipts of the house, after all incidental expenses are deducted, are divided into four and twenty shares, four of which are called *dead* shares, and taken by the manager as payment for the use of his dresses and scenes; to these is added the share to which he is entitled as a performer. Our manager (Stanton), has five sons and daughters all ranked as performers; so that he sweeps eleven shares, that is, near half the profits of the theatre, into his pocket every night. This is a continual subject of discontent to the rest of the actors, who are all, to a man, disaffected to the higher powers. They are, however, most of them in debt to the manager, and of course chained to his gally; a circumstance which he does not fail to remind them of, whenever they are refractory."[2]

"They appear to be a set of merry, thoughtless beings, who laugh in the midst of poverty,

[1] Some of these "privileges" are hinted at in *The Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald* (1: 28); others are described by Holcroft in *Alwyn*, and later in these *Memoirs*.

[2] This characterization is almost exactly confirmed by Charles Macklin, writing under date of 10 May, 1771. (J. T. Kirkman, *Charles Macklin*, London, 1799, 2: 35): "The constitution of these strolling com-

and who never want a quotation [1] or a story to recruit their spirits. When they get any money, they seem in haste to spend it, lest some tyrant, in the shape of a dun, should snatch it from them. They have a circuit or set of towns, to which they resort when the time comes round; so that there are but three or four in our [2] company who are not well known in [Kendal].[3] I observe that the town's-people are continually railing at them: yet are exceedingly unhappy, if they fail to return at the appointed time. It is a saying among us, that a player's six-pence does not go as far as a town's-man's groat; therefore, though the latter are continually abusing them for running in debt, they take good care to indemnify themselves, and are no great losers, if they get ten shillings in the pound." [4]

This patriarchal manager, with his wife, sons,

panies is—that one man generally finds Cloaths and Scenes, for which he has *four* shares of the profits. Every performer is a sharer. The Number of performers about sixteen or eighteen. The person who provides the Cloaths and Scenes is deemed the Master of the Company, who makes all contracts for rents, etc., and is responsible for all expenses and contingencies of every kind, incidental to the undertaking."

[1] There is a character in S. W. Ryley's *The Itinerant* who talks like a page out of Bartlett.

[2] "*Our*." Thus Hazlitt. In *Alwyn* the word is "*the*," 1: 133. There are other minor word changes made by Hazlitt in extracting the quotation.

[3] Name filled in from the original passages in *Alwyn*, 1: 133.

[4] *Alwyn*, 1: 130–133.

and daughters, seems to have been not only an object of envy, but from his blunders and stupidity, the butt of the whole company. Among other instances, which are related of his talent for absurdity, he wished to have Shylock in the Merchant of Venice played in the dialect of Duke's Place,[1] and was positive Shakespeare intended it so. He once told the duke in Othello, a messenger was arrived from the *gallows*, instead of the *galleys ;* and in playing the part of Bardolph, where that worthy person, descanting on the fieriness of his nose, says, "Behold these meteors, these exhalations," he used to lift his hands to heaven with a solemn flourish, as if he had really seen "the heavens on fire."

[This fellow, who because he has had art and roguery enough to scrape together a few tinsel rags, and a little daubed canvass, is become as impudent and as consequential as a petty constable, or a new made justice, and about as wise too. He takes upon him to instruct the actors ; decides dogmatically upon any difficult passage, without being able to read it ; settles the business of the scene without a thought concerning propriety, and swells at the recollection of his own sagacity and importance, like an alderman saying grace after meat.[2]]

[1] Aldgate. A Jewish quarter since 1650.—W.-G.

[2] Taken from *Alwyn* (2 : 16). The family way of conducting these companies is referred to in Churchill's *Apology*, 11 : 212–15 :

> "The mighty monarch, in theatric sack,
> Carries his whole regalia at his back ;
> His royal consort heads the female band,
> And leads the heir apparent in her hand."

CHAPTER IV

WHILE Mr. Holcroft was in this company, or a short time before he entered it, he married again. His second wife was the sister of a Mr. Tipler, of Nottingham: by her he had two children, William, born in 1773, and Sophy, born at Cockermouth, in 1775. Her mother either died in child-bed of her, or shortly after. This marriage would have been a very happy one, had it not been embittered by scenes of continual distress and disappointment, which Mrs. Holcroft bore with a resignation and sweetness of temper, which could not but endear her to a husband of Mr. Holcroft's character. There is a sort of Shandean manuscript of his, written at this time, and in which he gives an account of his own situation, crosses, poverty, &c. In this there are several passages expressive of the tenderest attachment to his wife; and which, from the amiable character he has drawn of her, she seems to have deserved. One of these will, I think, strongly paint the amiableness of his own heart. After describing a series of misfortunes, he breaks out into the following beautiful address to his wife.

"Oh Matilda! shall I ever forget thy tender-

ness and resignation? Or when in the bitterness of despair, beholding thee pregnant, wan with watching thy sick infant, and sitting assiduously at thy needle to earn a morsel of bread,—when thou has beheld the salt rheum of biting anguish scald my agonizing cheek, with what tender love, what mild, what sweet persuasive patience, thou hast comforted my soul, and made even misery smile in hope, and fond forgetfulness! Richer than all the monarchs of the east, Matilda, has thy kindness made me: the world affords not thy equal!"

Mr. Holcroft afterwards [illegible] his wife into Booth's company. She had a good figure, and her husband had taught her to sing, and instructed her sufficiently in the business of the stage to render her serviceable to the theatre. When at Cockermouth in 1775, Mr. Holcroft addressed a letter and a poem to David Garrick, which I shall here insert; both as they are curious in themselves, and are characteristic of the state of his feelings at the time. For the romantic extravagance of his appeal to Garrick's generosity, no other apology seems necessary, than the old adage, that drowning men catch at straws.

To David Garrick, Esq.

"SIR,

"I know of no excuse that I can make for the impertinence of this address, but my feelings. They press hard upon me, they are not to be withstood. They have told me your sympathetic heart sighs for the distressed, and

weeps with the child of sorrow. I believe they told me truth.

"I am a strolling comedian, have a wife and family, for whom I would fain provide, but have sometimes, notwithstanding the strictest economy, found the task a very difficult one. I am now near three hundred miles from London, in a company that must, in all human probability, soon be dispersed; my wife lying-in at an inn, and in circumstances that I cannot describe. I do not wish to eat the bread of idleness; I neither know, nor wish to know any thing of luxury; and a trifling salary would make me affluent. I have played in the country with applause,[1] and my friends, I am afraid, have flattered me: some of them have ranked me among the sons of genius, and I have, at times, been silly enough to believe them. I have succeeded best in low comedy and old men. I understand music very well, something of French and fencing, and have a very quick memory, as I can repeat any part under four lengths at six hours' notice. I have studied character, situation, dress, deliberation, enunciation, but above all, the eye and the manner; and have so far succeeded, as to be entirely at the head of my profession here in all those characters which nature has any way qualified me for. I am afraid, Sir, you think by this time that I have undertaken to write my own

[1] The provinces were termed "a nursery for London" in a theatrical sense. *The Theatric Tourist* (London, 1805), p. 1.

panegyric. That however, is far from my intention; neither do I wish for employment in any but a very subordinate situation. My wife is a good figure, but her timidity would always place her behind a Queen at your theatre. If you were to find me capable of any thing better than an attendant, [illegible] I cheerfully accede. If you do not chuse to employ my wife, but would only engage me, I think we should *both* remember it with that enthusiasm of gratitude, with which good minds are oppressed when they receive favours which they have no possible means of returning.

"I am, Sir,

"Your very humble Servant, &c.

Cockermouth, in Cumberland, June 1st, 1775, at the house of George Bowes, hatter.

"P. S. With respect to the trifling Poem inclosed, I meant only to ease my own heart by it: should it reach yours, it will be more than I can expect."

HOPE;

or,

THE DELUSION.

Advance, soft soother of the mind,
Oh! hither bend, a welcome guest:
Sweet Hope! stray hither, here thou'lt [illegible]
Those sanguine thoughts, that please thee best.

Fair Fancy bring, thy darling child,
Deck'd in loose robes of Alpine white:
With thee, her happy Parent, wild
She wings her bold, romantic flight.

Blest pair! I'll sing, inspir'd by you,
  Of wealth bestow'd to noble ends,
Of sweet enchanting scenes in view,
  Of future times and faithful friends.

Tho' my sweet William, prattling youth,
  For bread oft begs in accents meek;
Matilda, fairest flower of truth,
  Droops on my breast her dew-dipt cheek.

Tho' the big tears run down my face
  To see her aspect wan and mild,
And hear her lov'd affection trace
  My care-mark'd features in our child.

Tho' fortune lowly bows my neck,
  And cares not for the wretch's groan,—
Yet smile but Hope, or Fancy beck,
  And I'll ascend her star-built throne.

Now, now I mount! Behold me rise!
  Hope lends me strength, and Fancy wings,
Oh! listen to the magic lies,
  Which fleeting, faithless Fancy sings!

With Independence truly blest,
  Of some neat cot she styles me lord,
Where Age and Labour love to rest,
  Where healthy viands press the board.

Now lay me down, kind nymph, at ease
  Beneath yon verdant mountain's brow,
Where wanton zephyrs fan the trees,
  Where violets spring, and waters flow.

What joys—delusive charmer, hold!
  Despair has seiz'd my thick'ning blood:
Her lips how pale! Her cheek how cold!
  Matilda faints for want of food!

The foregoing stanzas have been given less for the poetry than the history they contain. The distress which they paint did not, it seems, reach Garrick's heart: at least Mr. Holcroft left Cockermouth some time after without having received an answer to his letter. Whether his wife died before or after he left Cockermouth, I do not know; but there is an epitaph on Mrs. Holcroft, written about this period, in which he feelingly laments her loss.

Beauty, Love, and Truth lie here:
  Passenger, a moment stay!
Breathe a sigh, and drop a tear,
  O'er her much-lamented clay.

Death! thy dart is harmless now,
  Widow'd griefs thy stroke defy:
Weak the terrors of thy brow
  To the wretch who longs to die.[1]

At the time that Mr. Holcroft was at Cockermouth, he was in Booth's company, which he had joined at Carlisle in the autumn of 1774. He had just then left Stanton's company, who were performing at Kendal. He was recommended to Booth by a friend of the name of Hatton, who was an excellent comedian, and the hero of the company. He had spoken in high terms of Holcroft's talents, who himself sent off a letter as his *avant-courier*, in which he undertook to do a great deal for very little. He

[1] This was printed as part of an article in *The Town and Country Magazine*, January, 1779 (11: 27).

engaged to perform all the old men, and principal low-comedy characters; he was to be the music, that is, literally the sole accompaniment to all songs, &c., on his fiddle in the orchestra; he undertook to instruct the younger performers in singing and music, and to write out the different casts or parts in every new comedy; and, lastly, he was to furnish the theatre with several new pieces, never published, but which he brought with him in manuscript, among the rest Dr. Last in his Chariot, which character he himself performed. Here was certainly enough for one man to do;[1] and for all these services, various and important as they were, he stipulated that he should be entitled to a share and a half of the profits of the theatre, which generally amounted to between four and five pounds a night whenever it opened, that is, three times a week. This proposed salary could not, there-

[1] There is on record a performance of *Pizarro* by four men and three women, where a handy and agile actor did five rôles in the same evening. Ryley, *The Itinerant*, 9: 84–85. The books of a company, now in the British Museum, give a list of fifty characters which one member of that company was qualified to act. *Add. MSS.*, 33: 488, fol. 3, 4, 5. The story of Edmund Kean's experiences as a stroller is distinctly a chapter in versatility. F. W. Hawkins, *Life of Edmund Kean*, 1869, 1: 49, 54–123. Says Churchill in *The Apology*, ll. 226–229:

> "By need compell'd to prostitute his art,
> The varied actor flies from part to part;
> And, strange disgrace to all theatric pride!
> His character is shifted with his side."

fore, amount to more than seventeen or eighteen shillings weekly.

In the above list of employments, which Mr. Holcroft undertook to fulfil, the capital attraction, and that which he believed no country manager could resist, was the character of Dr. Last, which he did in imitation of the London performers. The scene in which he produced the most effect was that of the doctor's examination. This, as I have heard described, was a very laughable, if not a very pleasing performance. Mr. Holcroft was naturally rather long-backed; and in order to give a ridiculous appearance to the doctor, he used to lean forward, with his chin raised as high as possible into the air, and his body projecting proportionably behind; and in this frog-like attitude, with his eyes staring wide open, and his teeth chattering, he answered the questions that were put to him, in a harsh, tremulous voice, sometimes growling, and sometimes squeaking, and with such odd starts and twitches of countenance, that the effect produced upon the generality of spectators was altogether convulsive. The person who gave me this description said he thought the part a good deal overdone, but that it was a very entertaining caricature. Mr. Holcroft himself went through this part to gratify a friend, a very short time before his death. He said, it always produced a very great effect, whenever he acted it; but that the chief, or only merit it had, was that of being a close imitation of Weston's manner of doing it.

Weston is celebrated for his unrivalled power of face, for looking the fool more naturally than any one else. Mr. Holcroft speaks of him in the following manner in the Theatrical Recorder.[1] — "As an actor, I remember him well: to think of a few unrivalled performers, and to forget Weston, is impossible. The range of characters that he personated was confined. The parts in which he excited such uncommon emotion, were those of low humour. He was the most irresistible in those of perfect simplicity: his peculiar talent was the pure personification of nature. I do not think it possible for an actor to be less conscious than Weston appeared to be, that he was acting. While the audience was convulsed with laughter, he was perfectly unmoved: no look, no motion of the body, ever gave the least intimation that he knew himself to be Thomas Weston.[2] Never for a moment was Thomas Weston present: it was always either Jerry Sneak, Doctor Last, Abel Drugger, Scrub, Sharp, or the very character, whatever it was, he stood there to perform; and it was performed with such a consistent and peculiar humour, it was so entirely distinct from any thing we call acting,

[1] Not Holcroft's own words, though, as Hazlitt seems to imply, but taken from a pamphlet for insertion in the magazine.

[2] (1737–76.) *Jerry Sneak*, in Foote's *The Mayor of Garratt* (1763). *Abel Drugger*, in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610). *Scrub*, in *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707), by George Farquhar (1678–1707). *Sharp*, in David Garrick's *The Lying Valet* (1741).—W.-G.

and so perfect a resemblance of the person whom the pencil of the poet had depicted, that not only was the laughter excessive, nay sometimes almost painful, but the most critical mind was entirely satisfied. I doubt if Garrick, or any other actor, had so complete a power of disguising himself, and of assuming a character with so little deviation from the conception he had previously formed. It was not only a perfect whole, but it was also unique.

"He first appeared in tragedy, which he always considered as his forte, though he was utterly unqualified for it. It was much against his will that he was accidentally forced to play Scrub in the Beaux' Stratagem, when he threw every one into raptures, except himself. Even the very boys followed him in the streets, exclaiming, 'There—that's he that played Scrub!' His first appearance in London was at a booth in Bartholomew Fair.[1] He was afterwards engaged by Foote, who was the first person who introduced him to public notice, and who wrote the part of Jerry Sneak expressly for him. Several stories are told of the readiness of his wit, and presence of mind.

"Shuter [2] had long been the favourite of the

[1] A famous ground for shows and theatrical exhibitions. The fair was held at West Smithfield from 1133 to 1855, and centred round the festival of St. Bartholomew, Aug. 24.—W.-G.

[2] Edward Shuter (? –1776), "a performer of considerable merit in low comedy; . . . but his comic humor often degenerated into buffoonery to please the

galleries; and Weston, before he was well known, appeared as a substitute for Shuter, in the part of Sharp. Shuter's name was in the play-bills; and when Weston appeared, the galleries vociferated, 'Shuter, Shuter!' Mrs. Clive[1] played the part of Kitty Pry, and was no less a favourite than the other. The uproar continued, and nothing could be heard but 'Shuter, Shuter!' As soon as it was possible to be heard, Weston, in his own inimitable and humourous manner, asked aloud, in a seriously stupid amazement, and pointing to Mrs. Clive,—'Shoot her! Shoot her! Why should I shoot her? I am sure she plays her part very well!' The apparent earnestness and simplicity with which he asked this question, were so inimitable, and it so truly applied to the excellent acting of Mrs. Clive, that the burst of laughter was universal, and the applause which Weston deserved, attended him through the part.

galleries." Mentioned in Churchill's *Rosciad*, ll. 29–30, as keeping open house at Southwark fair. Also, he

"never cared a single pin,
Whether he left out nonsense, or put in" (ll. 649–50).

[1] Catherine Clive (1711–85), a comic actress with a wide range of successful parts, who left the stage in 1769, lived at Twickenham, near Walpole, who delighted in her society. Churchill, in his *Rosciad*, ll. 685–94, praised her highly, saying:

"Original in spirit and in ease,
She pleased by hiding all attempts to please:
No comic actress ever yet could raise,
On humour's base, more merit or more praise."

"Weston was no less remarkable for his dissipation and poverty, than for his comic excellence. It happened on a day that his name was in the play-bills, that he was arrested for a small sum, which he applied to the managers to discharge, which request they refused. Being known to the bailiff, Weston prevailed on him and his follower to go with him to the play, where he placed himself and them in the front of the two-shilling gallery.—Before the curtains drew up, an apology was made, that Mr. Weston being ill, could not possible attend; and it was therefore hoped, another performer might supply his place. Weston rose, as he intended, and declared aloud, the apology was entirely false; he was there, well, and ready to do his part, but that he was in custody for a small debt, for which, though entreated, the managers had refused to give security. Weston had well forseen the consequences: the managers were obliged to set him free. Another actor would have immediately been expelled the theatre; but for Weston no substitute could be found."—Vol. ii. p. 112.[1]

The reason has often been asked, why actors are imprudent and extravagant. An answer may be found in the very nature of their profession. They live in a world of fancy, of artificial life and gaiety, and necessarily become careless of the real consequences of their actions. They

[1] Cf. a similar passage in [Hazlitt's] *The Round Table*, "On Actors and Acting."—W.-G.

make realities of imaginary things, and very naturally turn realities into a jest. Besides, all persons are so, who have no settled prospects in life before them.[1]

The history of the company in which Mr. Holcroft was now engaged, deserves notice from its singularity. The name of the original founder of the company was Mills, a Scotchman. He and his family had formerly travelled the country, playing nothing but Allan Ramsay's Gentle Shepherd. This they continued to do for several years without either scenery or music.[2] As the younger branches of the family grew up, one of them became a scene-painter, and some of the others learned to fiddle. They now, therefore, added scenes and music to the representation of their favourite pastoral. They afterwards enlarged their circuit, and made excursions into the North of England: and though the loves of Patie and Peggy were a never-failing source of delight on the other side of the Tweed, their English auditors grew tired of this constant sameness. They therefore, after the performance of the Gentle Shepherd, which was still the business of the evening, introduced a farce

[1] This paragraph and the four preceding ones appeared in the original edition as a footnote by Hazlitt.

[2] Note the reference in Churchill's *Apology*, ll. 220–3:

"No swords, no daggers, not one poison'd bowl;
No lightning flashes here, no thunders roll;
No guards to swell the monarch's train are shown;
The monarch here must be a host alone."

occasionally, as a great treat to the audience. Mills's daughters married players. This brought an accession of strength into the family, so that they were now able to act regular plays; and by degrees, Allan Ramsay, with his shepherds and shepherdesses, and flocks of bleating sheep, was entirely discarded. Still, however, during the life-time of Mills, the whole business of the theatre, even to the shifting of the scenes, or making up of the dresses, was carried on in the circle of his own family. At his death, the property of the theatre was purchased by a Mr. Buck (formerly of Covent Garden theatre), who kept an inn at Penrith, and it was by him let out to Booth.

Mrs. Sparks, of Drury Lane Theatre, was an actress in this company, at the time Mr. Holcroft belonged to it, and the youngest daughter of Mills, the late manager. Mrs. Inchbald[1] was playing in the same company, at Inverness, in Scotland, in 1773, or the winter of 1774. The company afterwards went to Glasgow, where not being permitted to play, they were all in the utmost distress. The whole stock was detained for rent and board, &c., at an inn. From this awkward situation they were liberated by a young Scotchman, who had just joined the company in a kind of frolic, and who paid their

[1] Elizabeth Inchbald (1753–1821), novelist, dramatist, and actress.—W.-G. Her *Memoirs*, by Jas. Boaden, 1833, are often referred to in the notes to later chapters of this edition. See also: "The Inchbald's Strolling into Glasgow," *Notes and Queries*, 13 S. i, 343, Nov. 3, 1923.

score, and set them off to Kilmarnock, and from thence to Ayr, where they had a very brilliant run of good fortune.

Booth, the manager, was the same person who has since been well known as the inventor of the polygraphic art,[1] and of the art of making cloth without spinning or weaving. He appears to have been always a man of much versatility of enterprise; and at this time added to his employments of manager and actor, the profession of a portrait-painter. The first thing he did when he came to any town, was to wait on the magistrate, to ask leave for his company to play; or if this was refused, that he might have the honour of painting his picture. If his scenes and dresses were lying idle, he was the more busy with his pencil: and that tempting bait hung out at the shop-windows, *Likenesses taken in this manner for half-a-guinea*, seldom failed to fill his pockets, while his company were starving.

[1] See pp. 245–246, *infra*.

CHAPTER V

MR. HOLCROFT continued in Booth's company about a year and a half. He next joined Bates's company,[1] which made the circuit of the principal towns on the east side of the north of England, including Durham, Sunderland, Darlington, Scarborough, Stockton-upon-Tees, &c.

It was sometime in the year 1777, that Mr. Holcroft walked with Mr. Shield[2] (the celebrated composer, who was then one of the band in the same company) from Durham to Stockton-upon-Tees. Mr. Holcroft employed himself on the road in studying Lowth's Grammar,[3] and reading Pope's Homer.—The writers that we read in our youth are those, for whom we

[1] John Bates (1741–1799).—W.-G.

[2] William Shield, musical composer (1748–1829). He wrote the music for *The Flitch of Bacon*, the success of which obtained for him the post of composer to Covent Garden Theatre; and he composed many popular songs.—W.-G. He did the music for some of Holcroft's "comic operas."

[3] *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, 1762, by Robert Lowth (1710–1787), distinguished theologian and controversialist, commentator on Hebraic literature, and former professor of poetry at Oxford.

generally retain the greatest fondness. Pope always continued a favourite with Mr. Holcroft, and held the highest place in his esteem after Milton, Shakespeare, and Dryden. He used often, in particular, to repeat the character of Atticus, which he considered as the finest piece of satire in the language. Moral description, good sense, keen observation, and strong passion, are the qualities which he seems chiefly to have sought in poetry. He had therefore little relish even for the best of our descriptive poets, and often spoke with indifference, approaching to contempt, of Thomson, Akenside, and others. He was, however, at this time, exceedingly eager to make himself acquainted with all our English poets of any note; and he was seldom without a volume of poetry in his pocket.

At the time that Bates's company were at Scarborough, Fisher, the late celebrated oboe player, gave concerts there, which were led by Dance, and in which a Miss Harrop (afterwards Mrs. Bates) was the principal vocal performer. Holcroft used to sing in the choruses.—He at this time practised a good deal on the fiddle, which he continued ever after to do occasionally; but he never became a good performer. It was Bates who conducted the commemoration of Handel at Westminster Abbey.[1]

[1] Holcroft, Fawcett, Busby, and Shield took part, as tenors. Cf. 26 *May*–5 *June*, 1784. *Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Parthenon, in commemoration of Handel.* By Charles Burney, London, 1785 (p. 20).

Among the parts which Mr. Holcroft played most frequently, were—Polonius, which he did respectably; Scrub, in the Beaux' Stratagem; Bundle, in the Waterman; and Abel Drugger. He acted this last character after he came to London, one night when Garrick happened to be present.

At Stockton-upon-Tees, Mr. Holcroft first became acquainted with Ritson,[1] the antiquarian, and author of the Treatise on animal food, who was afterwards one of his most intimate friends. He was at that time articled to an attorney in the town; but was, like most other young men of taste or talents, fonder of poetry than the law. The poet Cunningham was an actor in the same company. He was the intimate friend of Shield. He was, it seems, a man of a delicate constitution, of retired habits, and extreme sensibility, but an amiable and worthy man. The parts in which he acted with most success were mincing fops and pert cox-combs,—characters the most opposite to his own. He played Garrick's character of Fribble, in Miss in her Teens.[2] He also excelled in Comus. He was often subject to fits of absence; as a proof of which, he once forgot that he had played the Duke of Albany in King Lear, and had returned

[1] Joseph Ritson (1752–1803), the antiquarian. *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty* (1802).—W.-G. An excellent study of Ritson was published in 1917 at Urbana, Ill., by Henry A. Burd.

[2] Dated 1747. *Comus* was a distortion of Milton's original often played at this time.

to the door of the theatre for the second time, before he recollected himself.—Besides his descriptive poems, he wrote several prologues;[1] and an opera called "The Lass with Speech," which was offered to the theatres, but never acted, and from which the Lying Valet was taken. He dedicated his poems to Garrick, who sent him two guineas on the occasion, which he returned, begging that they might be added to the theatrical fund. It seems he either did not want pecuniary remuneration for the compliment he had paid to Garrick, or he thought this a very inadequate one. When he was writing any thing, his room was strewed with little scraps of paper, on which he wrote down any thought as it occurred; and afterwards he had some difficulty in connecting these scattered, half-forgotten fragments together, before he could make out a fair copy.

At the time that Mr. Shield was most with him, he had been long in ill health, apparently in a decline; and this had given a deeper tinge of melancholy to the natural thoughtfulness of his disposition. A little before his death, he

[1] The various published collections of the poems of this John Cunningham (1729–1773) contain many epilogues and prologues for all sorts of plays, places, and events, and well illustrate the kind of versifying Holcroft himself was doing. Speaking of strolling life, the *Children of Thespis*, Third Part, 1788, says:

"Thus Cunningham wasted his bay-circled deed,
And charm'd rustic worth with his pastoral reed."

wrote the following lines, which seem to convey a presentiment of his fate.

> "Sweet object of the zephyr's kiss,
> Come rose, come, courted by the hours,
> Queen of the banks, the garden's bliss,
> Come, and abash yon tawdry flow'rs.
>
> 'Why call us to revokeless doom,'
> With grief the op'ning buds reply,
> 'Scarce suffer'd to expand our bloom,
> Scarce born, alas! before we die.'
>
> Man, having pass'd appointed years,
> (Years are but days) the scene must close—
> And when Fate's messenger appears,
> What is he but a withering rose?"

These lines can hardly fail of being acceptable to the reader, when he is told, they were the last ever written by a man, to whom we are indebted for some of the most pleasing and elegant pastoral descriptions in the language.—It must abate something of the contempt with which we are too apt to mention the name of a strolling player, when we recollect that Cunningham was one.[1]

[1] See Crabbe, *The Borough*, Letter XII, published the same year as Hazlitt completed these *Memoirs* (1810). "Players," says Holcroft, "by following their profession, act in some places contrary to all law, and are called strollers, vagabonds and vagrants, and in others are protected by the law and dignified with the high and mighty title of His Majesty's Servants" (*Hugh*

Mr. Holcroft had never been satisfied with his employment as a strolling actor in the country. He sighed for the literary advantages, and literary intercourse which London afforded. He was indeed the whole time labouring hard to cultivate his mind, and acquire whatever information was within his reach. But his opportunities were very confined. He had studied Shakespeare with the greatest ardour, and with some advantage to himself in his profession. Polonius was the character in which he was most successful: he also played Hamlet, and other

Trevor, 3: 103). Note also the following in Churchill's *Apology*, ll. 206–209:

"The strolling tribe, a despicable race!
Like wandering Arabs, shift from place to place.
Vagrants by law, to justice open laid,
They tremble, of the beadle's lash afraid."

Anthony Pasquin's *Children of Thespis*, Third Part, 1788, speaks of

". . . making a circuit thro' half-peopled towns,
And led by harsh Fate 'fore illiterate clowns, . . .
With a glance of expression that's dear to the muse;
As the crowds half-observant, with apathy gaze,
Unimpress'd by her force, and unskill'd in her lays."

Holcroft further says:

"The laws have, unjustly, empowered the demon of persecution to assault the profession of a player. Narrow-minded people have taken advantage of this injustice, and placed the professors at a distance, which ignorance and arrogance, at all times, suppose they have a right to preserve; and the want of principle and abilities in the

parts, of which he was but an indifferent representative. I have been told, that Mr. Holcroft's acting, both in its excellence and defects, more resembled Bensley's than any other person's. The excellent sense and judgment of that able actor were almost entirely deprived of their effect, by his disadvantages of voice and manner. Mr. Holcroft, in the performance of grave parts, had the same distinct, but harsh articulation, and the same unbending stiffness of deportment.

After wandering for seven years as an itinerant actor, with no very brilliant success, he resolved

player, too frequently, justifies this usurpation. The most uncultivated among the comedians get, habitually, and from the mere repetition of their parts, refined notions, which are several degrees beyond the sphere of the lower orders of the people, with whom they are obliged either to associate, or to seek the society of the abandoned and dissolute among the higher, the respectable part of whom are stigmatized with want of decorum, if they are known to hold any converse with men whom the law calls vagabonds. Though this is a kind of life, to which I already perceive I should by no means give the preference, except, as at present, from motives of convenience; yet my residence among these, frequently unfortunate sons of the muses, interests me greatly in their behalf; and I have reason to hope, from that philosophical liberality of sentiment which prevails, and so nobly dignifies the present age, to see the time when none shall have the power, and few the inclination, to oppress those people, who, under proper regulations would be our best moral teachers" (*Alwyn*, 2: 30).

upon trying his fortune in London, and arrived there early in the latter end of 1777. His stay with the last company, which he joined, must therefore have been short. His separation from this company was I believe in some measure hastened by little disagreeable circumstances, but it was no doubt chiefly owing to the general bias of his inclination, to the desire and expectation of fame of some sort or other, either theatrical or literary, on which his mind had for some years been brooding. It is not likely that his success on the stage, though it might in time have ensured him a livelihood in inferior parts, would ever have been such as to satisfy the ambition of an aspiring and vigorous mind. It was however on his talents as an actor, that he first rested his hopes of pushing his fortune in London, and of recommending himself to the favour of the public. But before we follow him up to town, it may not be improper to take a retrospect of the path we have already trod. There are some persons of nice tastes, who may perhaps be disgusted with the meanness of his adventures; and who may think the situation in which he embarked in life, and the society into whose characters and manners he seems to have entered with so much relish, unworthy of a man of genius.

But it should be recollected, first, that men of genius do not always chuse their own profession or pursuit. In Mr. Holcroft's case, the question was, whether he should turn strolling player, or starve.

Secondly,[1] there are in this very profession, which is held in such contempt, circumstances which must make a man of genius, not very averse to enter into it. In spite of the real misery, meanness, ignorance, and folly, often to be found among its followers, the player as well as the poet, lives in an ideal world.

The scenes of petty vexation, poverty, and disappointment, which he has to encounter, are endless; so are the scenes of grandeur, pomp, and pleasure, in which he is as constantly an actor. If his waking thoughts are sometimes disagreeable, his dreams are delightful, and the business of his life is to dream. This may be a reason why every one else should shun this profession as a pest, but it is for this very reason that the man of genius may pass his time pleasantly and profitably in it. But let us hear Mr. Holcroft's apology for his former way of life, which seems to have been dictated with a

[1] Cf. a similar passage in *The Round Table*, or "Actors and Acting."—W.-G.

Holcroft remarks: "You say he is become a player. A profession that, in my opinion, contains the extremes of good and bad. The sublime and forcible lessons of morality with which our dramatic pieces abound, scarcely permit the inculcator to stand neuter. He must either assent to them, with that warmth which characterizes good and great men, or, by a most despicable excess of hypocrisy, counterfeit, and *seem* to feel, that virtue to which his mind is a stranger" (*Alwyn*, 2: 143).

view to his own feelings. "Know then," he says,[1] "there is a certain set or society of men, frequently to be met in straggling parties about the kingdom, who by a peculiar kind of magic, will metamorphose an old barn, stable, or out-house, in such a wonderful manner, that the said barn, stable, or out-house, shall appear, according as it suits the will or purpose of the said magicians, at one time a prince's palace; at another, a peasant's cottage; now the noisy receptacle of drunken clubs, and wearied travellers, called an inn; anon the magnificent dome of a Grecian temple. Nay, so vast is their art, that, by pronouncing audibly certain sentences, which are penned down for them by the head, or master magician, they transport the said barn, stable, or out-house, thus metamorphosed, over sea, or land, rocks, mountains, or deserts, into whatsoever hot, cold, or temperate region the director wills, with as much facility as my lady's squirrel can crack a nut-shell. What is still more wonderful, they carry all their spectators along with them, without the witchery of broom-sticks.[2] These necromancers, although whenever they please they become princes, kings, and heroes, and reign over all the empires of the vast and peopled earth; though they bestow

[1] *Hugh Trevor*, 3: 101–102.

[2] Not always. "At its best the stage has its bitters mingled with its sweets," says Tate Wilkinson, *Memoirs*, 1: 228, and tells of strolling actors "saluted with a variety of candlesticks, branches, and flying candles."

governments, vice-royalties, and principalities, upon their adherents, divide the spoils of nations among their pimps, pages, and parasites, and give a kingdom for a kiss, for they are exceedingly amorous; yet, no sooner do their sorceries cease, though but the moment before they were revelling and banqueting with Marc Antony, or quaffing nectar with Jupiter himself, it is a safe wager of a pound to a penny that half of them go supperless to bed. A set of poor, but pleasant rogues! miserable, but merry wags! that weep without sorrow, stab without anger, die without dread, and laugh, sing, and dance, to inspire mirth in others, while surrounded themselves with wretchedness. A thing still more remarkable in these enchanters is, that they completely effect their purpose, and make those, who delight in observing the wonderful effects of their art, laugh or cry, condemn or admire, love or hate, just as they please; subjugating the heart with every various passion: more especially when they pronounce the charms and incantations of a certain sorcerer, called Shakespeare, whose science was so powerful, that he himself thus describes it:

> "... I have be-dimm'd
> The noon-tide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
> Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt: the strong-bas'd promontory
> Have I made shake; and by the spurs pluck'd up
> The pine and cedar: graves, at my command

Have wak'd their sleepers; op'd, and let them forth
By my so potent art."[1]

[1] *The Tempest*, Act V, Sc. 1. The following characterization is from Churchill's *The Apology*, ll. 236–243:

"In shabby state they strut, and tatter'd robe,
The scene a blanket, and a barn the globe:
No high conceits their moderate wishes raise,
Content with humble profit, humble praise.
Let dowdies simper, and let bumpkins stare,
The strolling pageant hero treads in air:
Pleased for his hour, he to mankind gives law,
And snores the next out on a truss of straw."

CHAPTER VI

MR. HOLCROFT arrived in London, just at the time that Mr. Sheridan came into the management of Drury-Lane.[1] He endeavoured to procure an engagement at this, and at the other house; but in vain. As a last desperate resource, when his money was nearly exhausted, he sat down and wrote a farce, called The Crisis, or Love and *Fear*,[2] which Mrs. Sheridan was prevailed on to read; and this, with his musical knowledge (as he was able to sing in all choruses), procured him an engagement at twenty shillings a week.[3] On

[1] 1776. "This gentleman is very deservedly called the *Congreve* of the present day." Note to Sheridan in John Williams' (Anthony Pasquin's) *Children of Thespis*, Second Part, 1787.

[2] The original edition had "Famine." For the correction see my Bibliography.

[3] His first novel, *Alwyn* (1780), was accordingly dedicated as follows: "To R. B. Sheridan, Esq.; Men of Genius are the best and properest patrons of literary productions. It is their fiat that gives stability or consigns to oblivion: and every one will read, what they pronounce worthy to be read. When this circumstance is remembered, nobody will wonder to see a dedication to the author of the School for Scandal."

his being engaged, Mr. Holcroft was desired by Mr. Sheridan to give in his cast of parts to Mr. Hopkins, the prompter; and they were as follows:

Don Manuel . .	Kind Impostor
Hardcastle . . .	She Stoops to Conquer
Justice Woodcock .	Love in a Village
Hodge . . .	Ditto
Giles . . .	Maid of the Mill
Ralph . . .	Ditto
Sir Harry Sycamore .	Ditto
Scrub . . .	Beaux' Stratagem
Sir Anthony Absolute .	Rivals
General Savage .	School for Wives
Colin Macleod . .	Faithless Lover
Mortimer . . .	Ditto
Sir Benjamin Dove .	Brothers
Major O'Flaherty .	West-Indian
Fulmer . . .	Ditto
Varland . . .	Ditto
Colonel Oldboy . .	Lionel and Clarissa

It was in this last part that Mr. Holcroft particularly wished to have made his first appearance. The manner in which he procured a recommendation to Mr. Sheridan, was through his cousin, Mrs. Greville. In consequence of this connexion, he also obtained introductions to Mrs. Crewe, and several other persons of fashion, who interested themselves in his behalf; and an epistolary intercourse commenced between

him and Mr. Greville [1] on subjects of taste and the theatre, which continued for some years.

His farce of the Crisis was, I believe, played but once, for the benefit of [the *Misses*] Hopkins, when it was [*not*] favourably received.[2]

Mr. Hopkins, the prompter, who had the regulation of the inferior parts in the theatre, entertained a very low opinion of Mr. Holcroft's powers as an actor ; and he remained unnoticed, till Mr. Sheridan by chance saw him in the part of Mungo, with which he was so much pleased as to order his weekly salary to be raised to five and twenty shillings. Both his salary and his reputation in the theatre seem now to have remained stationary during this and the following season, though he constantly attended the theatre to perform the most menial parts. The following

[1] Richard Fulke Greville, author of *Maxims, Characters, and Reflections* (1756), and grandfather of the diarists, Charles and Henry Greville. See *The Early Diary of Frances Burney* (ed. Annie Raine Ellis, 2 vols., 1889), and Boswell's *Life* (ed. G. B. Hill, iv, 304). Mrs. Greville (Frances Macartney) was Fanny Burney's godmother. She and her daughter (Mrs., afterward Lady, Crewe) were " the two greatest beauties in England." *Early Diary*, etc., I, p. 23.—W.-G.

[2] The original edition of the *Memoirs* read : " *Hopkins, the prompter, when it was favourably received. This Mr. Hopkins*, etc." There were two sisters, one of whom was in the original, excellent cast of *The School for Scandal*, a cast highly praised by Genest. *The Crisis* was never printed and the MS. has not survived. For further details, see my Bibliography.

extract from a letter addressed to Mr. Sheridan, will sufficiently explain both his situation and feelings at this time :

"Depressed, dejected, chained by Misfortune to the rock of Despair, while the vultures Poverty and Disappointment are feasting with increase of appetite upon me, I have no chance of deliverance but from you. You, Sir, I hope, will be my Alcides! Mr. Evans says, he must increase the deductions he already makes from my salary (9s. per week), unless I can obtain your order to the contrary. It is scarcely possible I should maintain my family, which will shortly be increased, upon my present income. Were I not under deductions at the office, my receipts would very little exceed sixty pounds a year; and this I enjoy more through your favour than any consequence I am of to the theatre, though continually employed. But then it is either to sit in a senate or at a card-table, or to walk in a procession, or to sing in a chorus, which is all that the prompter, who has the direction of this kind of business, thinks me capable of. Nay, in so little esteem am I held by Mr. Hopkins, that he took the part of a dumb steward in Love for Love from another person, and made me do it; and when by your permission I played Mawworm, he said, had he been well and up, it should not have been so. I do not mention this as a subject of accusation against Mr. Hopkins, but merely to shew that if I am consigned to his penetration, I am doomed to everlasting oblivion.

"Unhappily for me, when I performed Mawworm, you were not at the theatre. Interest

rather than vanity makes me say, I was more successful than I had any reason to expect. The audience were in a continual laugh.[1] I played Jerry Sneak for my own benefit last year, and with the same success;[2] and if I could only be

[1] The part of Mawworm, created by Weston in 1768, in Bickerstaffe's *The Hypocrite*, was played by Holcroft at Drury Lane, 11 Nov., 1779.

[2] Cf. *The Public Advertiser*, 18 May, 1779.

"The Public Advertiser.
Tuesday, May 18, 1779. No. 13918.

Drury Lane.
For the Benefit of Mr. Chaplin, Mr. Griffith,
Mr. Holcroft, and Miss Field.
By His Majesty's Company
At the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane,
This Day will be presented
King Richard the Third.

. . . . .

To which will be added (not acted this season)
The Mayor of Garratt.

Major Sturgeon (1st Time) .	Mr. Griffith
Sir Jacob Jollup . . .	Mr. Waldron
Mr. Bruin	Mr. Wright
Lint	Mr. Wrighten
Heeltap	Mr. Burton
Jerry Sneak (1st Time) . .	Mr. Holcroft
Mrs. Bruin	Miss Kirby
Mrs. Sneak	Mrs. Wrighten

Boxes 5s; Pit 3s; First Gall. 2s; Upper Gall 1s.

. . . . .

The Doors will be opened at Half after Five. To begin at Half after Six.

. . . . ."

introduced to the town in old men and burletta singing, I know from former experience how soon I should be held in a very different estimation from what I am at present. You do not know, Sir, how useful I could be upon a thousand emergencies in the theatre, if I were but thought of; but this I shall never be till your express mandate is issued for that purpose.

"You have frequently been pleased to express a partiality towards me, as well as a favourable opinion of my abilities. But, Sir, if you do not immediately interest yourself in my behalf, I may grow grey, while I enjoy your favour without a possibility of confirming or increasing it. 'Who's the Dupe' prevented the Crisis from being played last year: now you tell me you will talk to me after Christmas; in the mean time 'the Flitch of Bacon' and a new pantomime are preparing. I told those to whom I am indebted, I should have a chance of paying them soon, for that the Crisis would come out before the holidays. When I said so, I believed that it would; but they will think I meant to deceive them."

The concluding sentence of this letter is remarkable when we recollect the character of the celebrated man to whom it is addressed.

"In short, I am arrived at the labyrinth of delays, where suspense and all his busy imps are tormenting me—*You alone, Sir, hold the clue that can guide me out of it.*"

Mr. Sheridan, in spite of Mr. Holcroft's

entreaties, was not inclined on this occasion to perform the part of Theseus; for he was still left to the mercy of the remorseless prompter, and had no opportunity of exerting his talents till the Camp [1] came out [*Oct.* 15, 1778],[2] when he endeavoured, as he expresses himself, *to make a part* of a foolish recruit, and succeeded; in consequence of which his salary was raised to thirty shillings weekly.

Holcroft tells of his experiences as follows:

["The difficulty of getting a piece on the stage . . . all the town told me was incredible. It was a chancery-suit, which no given time could terminate. The manager was the most liberal of men, the best of judges, and the first of writers; as void of envy as he was noble minded, and friendly to merit. Yes, friendly in heart and act, when he could be prevailed upon to act. But his rare virtues and gifts were rendered useless, extinguished, by the killing vice of procrastination. He never listened to a story that he did not sympathize with the teller of it. The request must be a wild one indeed which he did not feel an instant desire to grant. He would promise with the most sincere and honest intentions to perform; but, hurried away by new petitioners, or

[1] This was a remarkably successful after-piece which ran many nights in 1778. By Richard Tickell (1751–1793). Apart from Mawworm Holcroft acted in *The Crisis*, 1 May, 1778; a plebeian in *Julius Cæsar* (with Baddeley), 29 Feb., 1780; Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and Dr. Last in *Dr. Last in his Chariot*, 29 April, 1780; and Binnacle in *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, 10 May, 1781.

[2] The original said: "in 1780."

projects of a more grand and important nature, he would with still greater facility forget. All who knew him uniformly affirmed, a soul more expansive, more munificent, could not inhabit a human form; yet, from this one defect, it was frequently his fate where he intended an essential benefit to commit an irreparable injury. He encouraged hopes that were never realized, retarded the merit he meant to promote, and raised up personal enemies who impeded his own utility; conspicuous and grand as this utility was and is, it would otherwise have been unexampled.

"I speak the sentiments of men who I believe were incapable of exaggeration. For my own part I have read his works, and I love him almost to adoring.

"He is I know assaulted by an infinite number of affairs, that all demand his attention. Many of them are totally beneath it, yet are undertaken by him with a too ready compliance; averse as he is to give the solicitor pain, and continually desirous to make every creature happy. He can do but one thing at once. Of the multitude of things to be done, not half are present to the memory at any time; and of those that are remembered, what can he do but select the most urgent? The mistake has often been rather in the too ready promise than in the non-performance. If prevented by serious occupation, by love of the chosen companions of his convivial hours, or by habits of forgetful revery, from reading my tragedy and being just to me, I attribute the neglect to its true cause; which certainly was not jealousy of, or indifference to, the man of talents. How can he honour merit, granting it to last, with which he is unacquainted? Yet let me not be misunderstood; though I love his comprehensive benevolence of soul,

I wish it were less undistinguishing :—I cannot applaud or approve the errors into which it leads, both himself and those he means to serve." [1]]

During the summer recesses of the years 1778 and 1779,[2] Mr. Holcroft had not been idle, but had made excursions to the Canterbury, Portsmouth, and Nottingham theatres, where he moved in a higher range of parts, and escaped from the drudgery of choruses and processions. The state of his health appears to have been one inducement for his leaving town in 1779; for he says in a letter, dated from Nottingham, in June, that but for this consideration, he believes it would have been more profitable for him to have remained in London. In these excursions he seems to have established a pretty intimate correspondence with a Mr. Hughes, the Portsmouth or Plymouth manager; for we find the latter writing to him for a supply of performers, and Mr. Holcroft in answer complaining of his being able only to meet with a Mrs. Hervey, of whom he gives a very satirical portrait, and a Mr. Cubit, a singer, who, he observes, had already been with Mr. Hughes, and who never visited a company twice.

Mr. Holcroft's business at the theatre, did not hinder him from pursuing his literary avocations. Besides the Crisis, he had already written

[1] *Hugh Trevor*, 3 : 174.

[2] He had also been in Canterbury during the summer of 1777 with Dimond's itinerant company. (*Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 1 : 87.)

two other after-pieces, the Shepherdess of the Alps,[1] and the Maid of the Vale.[2]

The following letter to Mrs. Sheridan, gives an account of the first of these :

"MADAM,

"It is with a peculiar pleasure that I have, by Mr. Sheridan's desire, an opportunity of addressing you. I am indebted to your benevolence and interposition, for my first obtaining admission in the theatre, and shall ever remember it with respect and gratitude. Give me leave, Madam, to intrude upon your patience for a moment, while I explain the motive of this address.—Mrs. Greville, Mrs. Crewe, and some other ladies of fashion and consequence, have kindly undertaken to patronize, and recommend the Shepherdess of the Alps. Mrs. Crewe has spoken to Mr. Sheridan concerning it, as he informed me last night, desiring me at the same time, to send it to you, who he said would not only read it yourself, but put him in mind of it. I believe myself almost certain of your good wishes, when you read the beginning, and recollect that your late dear and worthy brother pointed out the subject to me, encouraged me to pursue it, and had not only undertaken to set it, but had actually composed two songs. Pardon

[1] Never produced. Not to be confused with Dibdin's play of the same name. Cf. *Notes and Queries* (9 S. viii, 279; 11 S. ix, 68; and 11 S. x, 2–3) and my Bibliography.

[2] Never produced. Cf. *Notes and Queries*, 4 July, 1914 (11 S. x, 2) and my Bibliography.

me, Madam, for introducing a reflection. His esteem for me, I might almost say his friendship, shall never be forgotten, let my condition in life hereafter be what it may; it does me too much honour. You likewise, Madam, have some share in the work: it was in consequence of your advice and observations, that the comic part was introduced: it was at first intended only to affect the nobler passions, and to have been entirely serious.—I would not willingly appear too urgent: yet cannot forbear expressing some anxiety about the fate of my poor Shepherdess. I spent all the summer about it (certain as I thought then) of its coming out immediately.

"I am, Madam," &c.

The Maid of the Vale was a translation from the Italian comic opera of La Buona Figli[*u*]ola, which Mr. Arne, the son of Dr. Arne, employed him to alter and adapt to the English stage.

A good deal of altercation seems to have taken place between the author and musician respecting the division of the future profits of the piece; Mr. Holcroft claiming one half, to which his employer did not think him by any means entitled. In consequence, I believe, of these disagreements, the piece was not brought forward.

Mr. Holcroft afterwards offered his translation of this opera to Mr. King, the late actor, at that time manager of Sadler's Wells, by whom it was rejected.[1] Mr. Holcroft however, wrote several

[1] Thomas King (1730–1805). Very successful as Sir Peter Teazle and as the grave-digger in *Hamlet*.

little pieces for Mr. King, which were brought out at this theatre. The Noble Peasant (which afterwards came out at the Haymarket)[1] was originally intended to have been acted here. Mr. Holcroft always experienced from this gentleman the most liberal and friendly treatment, and was under considerable pecuniary obligations to him. Mr. Foote died in October, 1777, a few weeks before Mr. Holcroft came to town. In November,[2] he published an Elegy on his Death, which was the first composition of his that had appeared in print (since his essays in the Whitehall Evening Post). It met with a favourable reception. He had always respected the character of Foote, had been personally known to him, and lamented his death in terms dictated by real feeling, as much as by the inspiration of the muse. At the same time, he published a short poem on Old Age, which was bound up with the elegy.[3] In April, 1779,

Reputed for impartiality and justice. See *The Rosciad*, ll. 336–344, and note thereto, Aldine ed., 1 : 39.

[1] Aug. 2, 1784.

[2] The original text said : " In the spring of the following year." Cf., for correction of this date, *Notes and Queries*, 4 July, 1914 (11 S. x, 2), and my Bibliography.

[3] The death of Samuel Foote, and the contemplation of age at thirty-two, inspired Holcroft to nothing more than the regular moral platitudes of the century. For the relief of a public which had long suffered from poems imprinted in quarto volumes, Holcroft desisted from this serious verse-making after he had published *Human Happiness, or the Skeptic* in 1783.

I find him desiring his father, who lived at Bath, to make inquiries respecting the prizes given at the Bath Easton Vase,[1] the subjects proposed, and the length of the poems. "I have an inclination," he says, "to become a candidate for fame at that temple of Apollo, *not so much from a supposition that I shall gain the laurel, as because I think the plan deserves encouragement.*" The little deceptions of self-love, cannot but sometimes excite a smile.—It may be proper to notice here, that Mr. Holcroft kept up at this period a constant correspondence with his father, whose wife rented a small house and garden, either at or in the neighbourhood of Bath. The letters that passed between them, do honour to the feelings of both parties. Mr. Holcroft was always eager to communicate the news of any good fortune that had befallen him, and ready to lend every assistance in his power to his father, who was still frequently in pecuniary difficulties. From one of these letters, it appears that Mr. Holcroft, among other employments, had engaged to write a paper, called the Actor, for the Westminster Magazine,[2] and that he was

[1] "Lady Miller's collection of verses by fashionable people, which were put into her Vase at Batheaston Villa, near Bath, in competition for honorary prizes, being mentioned, he held them very cheap: '*Bouts-rimes* (said he) is a mere conceit, and an *old* conceit *now*; I wonder how people were persuaded to write in that manner for this lady.'" Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (ed. G. B. Hill, II, 336).—W.-G.

[2] See my Bibliography.

secretary to a society (the theatrical fund) for which he received ten pounds a year.[1] He also found time to write [a large number of articles for The Town and Country Magazine and][2] songs for Vauxhall, several of which became very popular. Among these, the greatest favourite was the ballad, beginning, "Down the Bourne and through the Mead," which was set to music by Shield.[3] This song, which is written in the

[1] This society was formed for the relief of much distressed actors and families of deceased actors as were in real need of financial assistance. From time to time benefit performances were given for the support of the fund and deficiencies were continually supplied by progressive weekly contributions from the performers. Cf. Genest, *History of the English Stage*, 5: 509–511; 7: 274; 8: 183; and Percy Fitzgerald, *Theatrical Anecdotes* (1874), p. 108. I have been able to find no corroboration of Holcroft's official position as secretary. For an account of the theatrical fund, see John Williams' (Anthony Pasquin's) *Children of Thespis* in *Pasquin's Poems*, Second Edition, 2: 266–267.

[2] See my Bibliography.

[3] See my Bibliography, where the words are reprinted in full, as extracted from *The Edinburgh Musical Miscellany*, 2nd ed., 1808, 2: 158–159. Another song written by Holcroft, a rondeau popular enough to get reprinted in one of the magazines of the time, *The Universal Magazine*, August, 1779, 68: 98, is also included in full in my Bibliography: "Tell me when, inconstant rover." As every one who reads his Thackeray or his Fanny Burney must know, one of the usual forms of amusement in London of the late eighteenth century was an evening at Vauxhall or at Ranelagh. And there

Scottish dialect, has often been taken for an old Scotch ballad, and has actually been printed in a collection of Scotch songs.

Mr. Holcroft was one evening drinking tea with some friends at White-Conduit House,[1] when the organ was playing the tune of Johnny and Mary. After they had listened some time, a person in the next door began to descant rather learnedly on the beauty of the Scotch airs, and the tenderness and simplicity of their popular poetry, bringing this very ballad as an illustration of his argument, neither the words nor music of which, he said, any one now living was capable of imitating. Mr. Holcroft on this, took occasion to remark the strange force of prejudice, and turning to the gentleman, interrupted his argument by informing him, that he himself was the author of the song in question, and that the tune was composed by his friend, Mr. Shield, who I believe was also there present.—This song had been composed for, and was originally sung at Vauxhall, by the celebrated Nan Catley. An Irish music-seller, at the St. Paul's Head in the

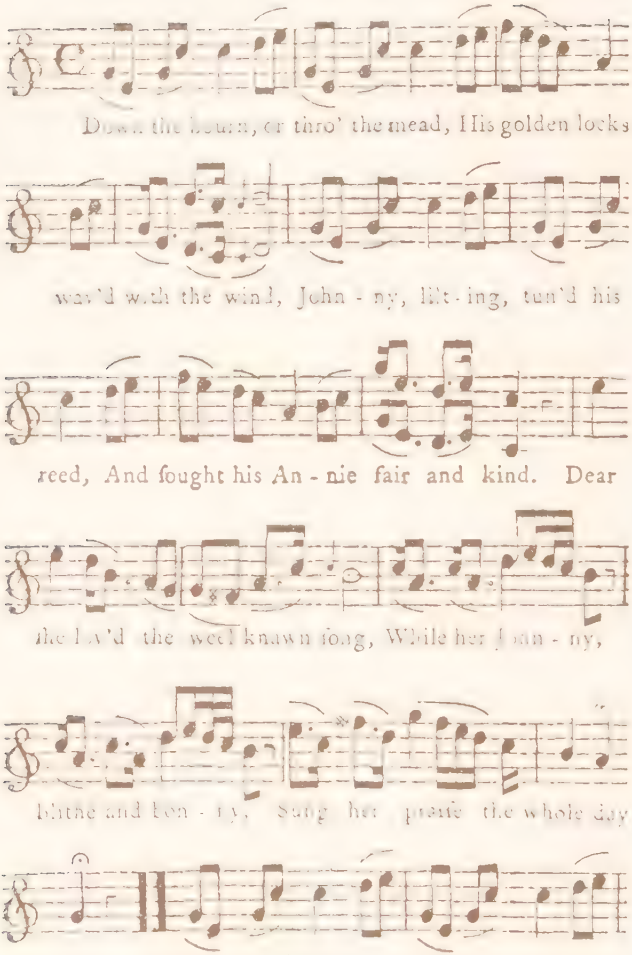
were many other similar places, like Marylebone Gardens, where without the formalities of a theatre people passed the time strolling about, chatting, dining, drinking, and listening to singers or entertainers. Sydney, *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, 1: 131–143. *The London Magazine* for the 1770's contains many such songs with their music, and there were many popular collections published.

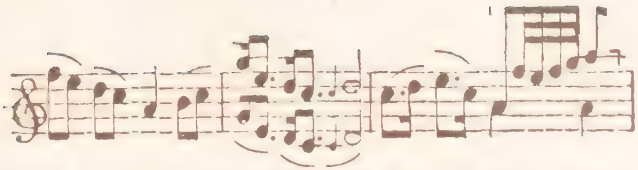
[1] The tea-gardens formerly on the east side of Penton Street, Pentonville, a resort of Goldsmith's.—W.-G.

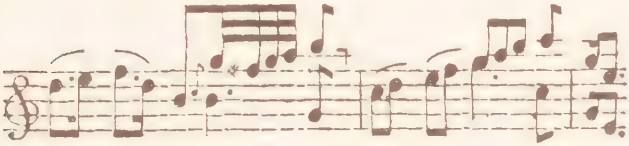
"JOHNNY AND MARY"

Facsimile of the words and music of the original ballad (from "The Vocal Enchantress. 1783") which Holcroft adapted for his well known song "Johnny and Mary"

SONG CXXXVIII.







Of coſtly claiths ſhe had bit few,
  Of pearls or jewels nae grat ſtore;
Fair was her face, her love was true,
  And Johnny wiſely wiſh'd nae more:
Love's the pearl that ſhepherds prize,
    O'er the mountain,
    By the fountain,
Wins the heart, and wiles the eyes.
    Down the bourne, &c.

Gowd and titles give not halth,
  Johnny cou'd nae theſe impairt;
Youthſoo Annie's greateſt walth
  Was her faithſoo Johnny's heart:
Sweet the joys the lover's find,
    Great the treaſure,
    Sweet the pleaſure,
Where the heart is always kind.
    Down the bourne, &c.

Strand, had procured the words and music and had advertised them in his window to be sold. Mr. Shield was accidentally passing, saw the music in the window, and went in to demand by what right the advertiser meant to publish his property. To this he received for answer, "By a very good right, for that music was composed by him (the vendor) and that the words had been written by a friend, for Miss Catley, whom he very well knew." It was with difficulty that Mr. Shield by informing him that he was the author of the music, prevailed upon the pretended composer to relinquish his claim.

[*To Mr. Freeman* *Bath.*

SIR,

I had once the pleasure of receiving a very human and sensible letter from you on the part of my father. After the character he has given of you, I do not wonder at it. Benevolence and wisdom frequently are, and ought always to be united. I am now to address you on his behalf. He informs me he is indebted to you to the amount of ten pounds, which was lent to him in necessity, and which I assure you is remembered by him with gratitude: it is an affair, that if I am not mistaken, does honour both to you and him. He is very anxious to have you satisfied that you shall not suffer for your generosity. I have it not in my power without great inconvenience to discharge the debt just at present, though it is a burthen which I wish to take from my father. I shall be enabled within this year, that is, at the beginning of next November, to pay it. I am secretary to a society which allows me that sum; and which, if you will accept of my

note, or a draft payable at that time,[1] shall be appropriated to this use. I shall be glad if you will favor me with a line respecting the affair, and after begging you will accept my most sincere thanks for the obligations I owe you on my father's account, take the liberty to subscribe myself, &c.

January 9, 1779.]

[*To Mr. Richard Hughes*

SIR, *Barnstaple.*

I shall execute with pleasure any little commands you will please to favour me with, and beg you will not suppose it any obligation. I have enquired concerning a first singer, but hear of none except Mr. Cubit. I have not applied to him, because I am told he has been with you before, and that he seldom visits one company twice. If you want a capricious hoyden, who values herself upon her character and virtue, yet walks about the town in men's clothes, with a long stride, and a fierce cocked hat; who has more spirits, and as many antics as an ape or a tumbler; who is a coquet this minute, and a prude the next; raps out a great oath now, and anon reads you a lecture upon propriety and decorum; talks *to* herself, *at* herself, *of* herself, and never for five minutes together upon any other subject; who affects the girl, and whose wrinkles are as apparent as her vanity; who yet does every manager she is with, considerable service, by the singularity of her character, and the free airs she gives herself among the men; who on the stage, has consider-

[1] The Theatrical Fund, for which see note 1, p. 197.

able merit in breeches' parts, coquets, &c., but who will be Wall and Moonshine, or haunt you both sleeping and waking; in short, if you want a person who is sentimental, dissipated, reserved, obliging, talkative, sullen, laughing, pouting, and all in less time than I could copy this period: who has many indications of strong sense, and more of absolute sanity: whose heart would direct her to do right, but whose vanity will not permit her: I say, if such a person please you, then take Mrs. H——. If you suspect me of pique or ill-nature while I have been painting this picture, you wrong me. I have not, nor is it probable I ever should again have, occasion to associate with Mrs. H——. If she should say it were a bad likeness, I will mend the copy when she mends the original. We have a new after piece of Mr. Sheridan's coming out this evening, "The Critic," from which we expect great things. Pray give my best respects to Mrs. Hughes, and believe me to be sincerely yours.

T. H.

Oct. 30th, 1779.]

[*To Mr. Holcroft*

My Dear Father,

I am glad the trifle I sent came safe to hand. Mr. Freeman's receipt is sufficient. You did not mention whether Mr. Freeman still continues your friend. I wish you would be kind enough to let me know whether you have all your garden ground, and your bed of asparagus still, and what you chiefly depend on for your livelihood. Let me beg of you not to be unhappy. When you can no longer make up your payments, give up your all and come to me. I have told you frequently, and I cannot repeat it too often, I will never see you want. I am afraid

you think the little I have hitherto done for you an obligation: I think I discover it in your letters. Let me intreat you, do not consider it in this light. You cherished me in infancy, and I should be very wicked to see you perish in age: you loved me then, and I love and reverence you now. I will shew you how sincere I am in my professions, the moment I have it in my power. I am exceedingly concerned for my poor mother's afflictions, I hope she endures them with patience and fortitude, which alone can alleviate and make them lighter. I was not at home when your friends from Bath called. I should have been happy to have seen them, but they never came again. I hope you bear the burthen of old age cheerfully: nothing but indifference to the accidents of life can make them supportable. Life itself is to the wisest, happiest, and longest lived, short, uncertain, and chequered with good and evil; a kind of dream that ends in a profound sleep. You are travelling towards the grave, and I am following you very fast, nay, possibly may finish the journey before you; but let us not be unhappy on that account: we shall rest from our labours, while our sons and daughters in numberless succeeding generations shall toil in the same steps, have the same hopes and disappointments, and sink at last into the same forgetfulness. Life is an April day; if we are impatient and out of humour, it is overcast with tempests, clouds, and rain; but if we bound our desires and are cheerful, sunshine and serenity prevail. Mrs. Holcroft and the three little ones are all well, as are all friends, who frequently inquire after you. You would be delighted with the children, especially the boy, who is a fine little fellow, reads well, and is learning French and Latin.]

[*To Mr. Holcroft,*

King's Mead Square, Bath.

My Dear Father,

I take great pleasure in hearing of your welfare, and that you are not likely to become unsettled again, which, if I had not a house to invite you to, would give me great pain to reflect on, more especially at your time of life. I cannot tell you how much I respect Mr. Freeman, he certainly must be a very benevolent, worthy man, and I beg you will assure him from me that he shall be certain not to lose the least part of the sum he has lent you: and that I am ready to give him my notes, if he pleases to accept of them, for the payment at such stated periods, as I find myself able to pay them at. Your property in your garden, and your own integrity, dear Sir, are sufficient security; but I would willingly remove every burthen from your shoulders, as well as give Mr. Freeman every certainty in my power. I am every day more esteemed, and I believe, if I have life and health, there is little doubt of my success. I hope, Sir, you will not think me rude in cautioning you not to be too eager in increasing your stock; as by having more affairs on your hands than your small capital can supply, you may easily lose the whole; besides that you bring a degree of trouble and anxiety on your mind that your health cannot now support perhaps. I am exceedingly glad to hear that my mother is better. We are all in good health, our relations dine with us on Sunday, and we always speak of you. Mr. Marsac is not arrived. My comedy is to be

played next season. God bless you both, and make you happy. I am, dear father, &c.

March 31*st.*[1]]

Mr. Holcroft, almost on his coming to town, married his third wife; and soon after, she and Mr. Holcroft determined upon taking a small house, and furnishing it. They were, however, diverted from this plan by a Mr. Turner, an upholsterer, in Oxford Road, who persuaded them that it would be much more advantageous to take a large house, which he would furnish, and give them credit for any length of time they demanded. He said, that many persons by letting the upper part of their houses, not only cleared their rent, but were often gainers. These arguments, and the additional motive of making a more creditable appearance, induced Mr. Holcroft to take a house in Southampton Buildings, which Mr. Turner furnished as he had promised, to the value of 240*l.* But scarcely were the goods lodged in the house, before the upholsterer became a bankrupt, and his effects and bills were consigned over to his creditors, who immediately came on Mr. Holcroft for 160*l.*, 80*l.* having been at first advanced to Mr. Turner for the furniture. This unexpected stroke completely ruined the prospects of our young housekeepers, and they were obliged to apply to several persons to prevent an execution, which was threatened. Mr. Holcroft might indeed have

[1] These letters originally appeared at the end of the *Memoirs*, 3: 247–257.

sold his goods for nearly the amount of the debt against him: but it seems that he was unwilling to see his property melt away under the hands of an auctioneer, and to have to begin the world again, after having, in a manner, realized all his hopes, by attaining a permanent and respectable establishment in life. He wrote to several persons to assist him in this emergency, with a degree of importunity which can only be excused by the severity of his disappointment, and a sense that it was undeserved on his part. He wrote to Mr. Greville, to a Mr. Laurel, to Mr. Sheridan, to the Proprietors of Drury-Lane, to persons whom he had never seen or known, with a kind of wild desperation. These applications indeed shewed no great knowledge of the world; but the abrupt appeals which he thus made to the humanity and generosity of others, at least proved that Mr. Holcroft was not without a strong sense of these qualities in his own breast, which made him believe they might be found to a romantic degree in others. His friend, Mr. King, at length relieved him from his immediate embarrassments by a loan of 80*l.* or 100*l.* This, however, was to be repaid; and at no great distance of time, the same difficulties, and the same struggles to extricate himself from them returned. At one time, great hopes were entertained from the expected arrival of a Mr. Marsac, a near relation of his wife, who had a handsome appointment in India; and who, in their present situation, it was thought, would be willing to assist them. But he did not arrive within the

time which had been fixed. Mr. Holcroft then wrote to a lady, high in rank and literary pretensions, but a stranger to him, stating the circumstances of his case, and inclosing a comedy, which he had written as a voucher for the justice of his claims: she had been the laborious patroness of departed genius, and he thought might be the friend of living merit. But it seems the inference was not justified by the event. The comedy was returned unread: and, indeed, if she had read it, a very favourable verdict could scarcely have been expected, under the annexed penalty of a hundred pounds. Mr. Holcroft has recorded this extravagance and its result among the adventures of Wilmot, the usher, in Hugh Trevor.[1] Mr. Holcroft now looked forward, as a last resource, to the success of the comedy itself (Duplicity) which was afterwards acted with applause; but such was the author's untoward fate, that even his success was attended with little advantage, and relieved his necessities but in part.

Mr. Holcroft had, at this time, few friends or acquaintance in London, and those few were very little able to afford him any material assistance. The oldest were Shield[2] and

[1] 3: 192.

[2] John Williams' (Anthony Pasquin's) *Children of Thespis*, Third Part, 1788, speaks very highly of Shield, calling him "one of the most extraordinary characters of the age," and going on to say: "To his great merit is annexed the most conciliating demeanor, and his private character is of so amiable a complexion that it

Perry,[1] both of whom he had known in strolling companies in the North: they had separated, had come to London about the same time, and met by chance. Shield first discovered Holcroft poring over an old book-stall, in Goodge-Street: they immediately recognized each other with a good deal of pleasure, and a friendly intercourse commenced, which was uninterrupted to the last. When the place of composer of the birth-day minuets at court became vacant by the death of Mr. Weideman, Mr. Holcroft applied to Mr. Greville to procure the place for Mr. Shield; with what success I do not know.

Mr. Shield at the period we are speaking of, had an engagement at the Opera-house. It was winter, and in consequence of some new piece, they had very long rehearsals every morning.

might be assumed by a monarch without a diminution of his dignity." He began as apprentice to a boat builder; played the violin during leisure hours; joined some comedians at Scarborough; was heard and invited to London by Giordini, conductor at the Opera House. A writer in *The European Magazine* for December, 1792 (22: 403), gives the following, among Holcroft's works, as "Musical Pieces Set By Shield": 1777, The Crisis, or Love and Fear. After-piece, not printed. 1784, Noble Peasant. An Opera. 1785, Choleric Fathers. An Opera.

[1] James Perry (1756–1821), political writer and joint editor and proprietor (with James Gray) of "The Morning Chronicle," "the only constitutional paper" referred to on p. 215—.W.-G. This is identical with the attribution in the "London Library" copy.

One day he was detained longer than usual, his dinner-hour was over, he felt himself very cold when he came out, and his attendance for so many hours had sharpened his appetite. He therefore proceeded up the Hay-market with a determination to get some refreshment at the first place that offered. He had strolled into St. Martin's-lane, without meeting with any thing that he liked: till he came to a little bye-court, called Porridge Island; at the corner of which, in a dark, dirty-looking window, he discovered a large round of beef smoking, which strongly seconded the disposition he already felt in himself to satisfy his hunger. He did not, however, much like the appearance of the place: he looked again, the temptation grew stronger, and at last he ventured in. Having asked for dinner, he was shewn into a room up one pair of stairs, not very large, but convenient and clean, where he found several persons already set down to dinner. He was invited to join them, and to his great joy found both the fare and the accommodation excellent. But his attention was shortly much more powerfully arrested by the conversation which took place at the table. Philosophy, religion, politics, poetry, and belles lettres were talked of, and in such a manner, as to shew that every person there was familiar with such subjects, and that they formed the ordinary topics of conversation. Mr. Shield listened in a manner which denoted his surprise and pleasure. The conversation at one time began to take rather a free turn, when a grave, elderly looking man,

who sat at the head of the table, addressed the new guest, telling him that he seemed a young man, and by his countenance shewed some signs of grace; that he would not have him mind what was said by persons who scarcely believed their own sophisms; that he himself when young had been attacked and staggered by the same objections; that he had examined them all, and found them all false and hollow. This diverted the discourse to other subjects which were more agreeable. The name of the person who had thus addressed Mr. Shield, and who thus assumed the office of a censor, was Cannon: he was the son of an Irish bishop. He was advanced in years, and presided in the company with an air of authority that was partly submitted to in earnest, and partly humoured for the joke's sake. He regularly dined here every day. On entering the room, he first pulled off his great coat, and fastened it with two long pins to the back of a tall cane-worked old chair with knobs behind: and after disposing of his umbrella, which in those days was a great singularity, he used to pay his respects to the company with much formality, and then sat down. He had one place, which was always kept for him; and for this privilege it seems he paid double price. If any stranger came in by chance, and took possession of his seat, he would never sit down in any other, but walked up and down the room in a restless way, till the person was gone. It was his constant custom to carry with him a small pocket volume of Milton, or Young's

Night Thoughts, in which he had made a great number of marginal notes ; and as soon as dinner was over, he regularly took out one of his favourite authors, and opening the book at random, requested the person who sat next him, whether a stranger, or one of the usual company, to read aloud a certain passage which he thought very beautiful. This offer was of course declined by those who knew him, who in return begged that he would favour the company with it himself, which he did, at the same time repeating the remarks which he had made in the margin. He then very deliberately closed the book, and put it into his pocket again. Cannon was a man of letters, and had travelled. He spoke a very florid language, full of epithets and compound words, and professed to be engaged in an edition of Tibullus. Mr. Shield was so much amused with this old gentleman, and interested in the general conversation (not to say that the commons were excellent), that he was determined he would in future dine no where else : he was also eager to inform Holcroft of the discovery he had made, whom he invited to go along with him the next day, and who also became a very constant visitor. The persons who were generally present were Messieurs Shield, Nicholson,[1] Holcroft, Cannon, &c., who formed themselves into a little society, which in compliment to the last mentioned

[1] William Nicholson (1754–1815), writer on chemistry. —W.-G. His name has been mentioned in a footnote above and appears frequently in these *Memoirs*.

person, was called "The Cannonian." The president was rather tenacious of his opinions, and impatient of contradiction; and frequently some very warm altercations took place in consequence between him and Mr. Holcroft.

The other friend of Mr. Holcroft, mentioned above, was a young Scotchman, who had been in Booth's company with him, but soon quitted it, and came up to London two or three years before him. They had had a violent quarrel while they were in this company, but meeting again in London, with new objects before them, and where they were both to a considerable degree strangers, former disagreements were forgotten, and a friendly intercourse commenced. He strenuously advised Holcroft to turn his thoughts to writing, or reporting for the newspapers, which he himself had found a lucrative employment, which Holcroft declined, being more bent on pushing his way at the theatre.

The manner in which this friend of our author began his career in life, deserves a place in a work which is little else than a history of the difficulties and successes which attend the efforts of men of talents and literature.

Mr. *Perry*, whose connexions were respectable, came to town, with recommendations to a banking-house in the city, and with an intention to get a place as clerk in some counting-house, or public office. He delivered his letters, and his friends promised they would be on the look-out for him. He called once or twice to no purpose, and as his time hung rather idly on

his hands, he had employed himself in writing one or two anonymous letters on the politics of the day, which were inserted in the General Advertiser. It so happened that one of the partners in the house to which he had been recommended, had a principal share in this very paper: and when he called, he told him that he had heard of nothing in the way that he wished; but taking out the Advertiser, and shewing him his own letter in it, "If now," said he, "you could do something of this kind I might possibly be of service to you." Mr. *Perry* replied, with some eagerness, that he was the author of the letter. "Aye, indeed," says the other, "then come with me; we must have some farther talk together." So saying, he took our young politician with him into another room; and after being closeted some time, it was arranged that *Perry* should be immediately employed as a writer and reporter for this paper, at a guinea and half a week. The very next night there was to be an important debate in the house, and our young gentleman was to make his *coup d'essai*. As however he was entirely ignorant of the forms and rules of reporting, it was thought necessary to give him some previous instructions; and he was told, that he should place himself so as to be able to hear the speakers distinctly; that he should provide himself with a pencil and pocket-book, in which he must note down the speeches as privately as he could; but that as he was a stranger, and might be noticed the more on

that account, if any one came to interrupt him, he was to say nothing, but put half a guinea into his hand. Thus equipped and instructed, Mr. *Perry* went early to his post, and planted himself in the middle of the gallery, directly in front of the speaker. He had his pencil and pocket-book ready in his hand, and the instant the debate opened, began to take notes with so much eagerness, and so little precaution, that a messenger came to him, and said, "Sir, you must give over writing." As he had been prepared for this event, he took the half guinea out of his pocket, and bending his hand behind him, offered the half-guinea, which was lodged in the palm of it, to the door-keeper, who took it without saying a word, and the other went on with his writing as before. But no sooner had he begun, than the man very quietly tapped him on the shoulder again, and said, "Sir, you must give over writing." This second rebuff was quite unexpected, and completely disconcerted our zealous reporter. He put his pencil and paper in his pocket, and sat during the remainder of the debate in a state of the utmost confusion, not expecting to remember a single sentence. He went home and related his ill-success; professing his inability to give any account of what he had heard. "But," said his employer, "you may at least try: you must surely recollect something of what passed." He said, "no: he had been in such a state of agitation the whole time, that it would be in vain to attempt it." As no one else had gone from the same office, and it was absolutely

necessary to give some account of the debate the next morning, he was again urged to make the attempt, and at length complied. He was left in the room by himself, and scarcely knowing what he did, began an account of the speech of Lord Nugent, who had opened the question. He was surprised to find that he could recollect the few first sentences. Still he despaired of being able to proceed: but by degrees, one thing recalled another, he still kept writing on without knowing what was to follow, and when he had finished one page, sent it down to the press. His hopes now began to revive, he returned to the charge, and writing under an apprehension that the words might every minute escape from his memory, he despatched sheet after sheet so vigorously, that the press could hardly keep pace with him. They had now printed two columns and a half, and Lord Nugent was still speaking. At last, the proprietor, who had at first dreaded a dearth of information, and whose fears were now alarmed the contrary way, came up to him, and said, "My G—d, when will this Lord Nugent's speech be done? Was there no other speaker the whole evening?" "Oh yes, there are seven or eight more to come." The other laughed, and told *Perry* that he had quite mistaken the business; that in his way of going on, he would fill a volume instead of a newspaper, and that he must begin again entirely, and instead of giving every word and sentence, merely repeat the heads of each speech, and a few of the most striking arguments. "Oh, is that all you

want?" exclaimed *Perry*, at once relieved from his terrors, "then I'm your man." Accordingly he set to work afresh, cut down Lord Nugent into half a column, and the other speakers had a proportionate space allotted them: and the report, thus curtailed, was the next day noticed as the ablest and fullest that had been given of the debate. The person, to whom this anecdote relates, has been long known to the public as the editor and proprietor of the only constitutional paper that remains.[1]

[1] Some manuscript notes in a copy of the 1816 edition of these *Memoirs* now in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, indicate P—— as Perry, and say: "The only constitutional paper that remains is the *Morning Chronicle*. He died with £190,000."

BOOK III

CHAPTERS ON LITERARY ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER I

MR. HOLCROFT, as he had intended, let part of his house, in Southampton Buildings, to lodgers. Among other inmates, were Miss Kemble (afterwards Mrs. Whitelocke) [1] and his friend *Nicholson*.[2] Holcroft used to take frequent opportunities of urging this gentleman to devote his talents to works of taste and imagination, and his mind teemed with the plots of comedies and subjects of novels, which he wished his friends to write. But as Mr. *Nicholson's* pursuits were of a totally different kind, it generally happened, that Holcroft himself, in the end, executed the works which he had planned for another. Of this kind was his first novel, entitled Alwyn, or, the Gentleman Comedian, which it was originally intended that Mr. *Nicholson* should compile from materials to be furnished by Holcroft, but

[1] Mrs. Whitlock (1761–1836) was a sister of Mrs. Siddons. Her husband was part proprietor of the Newcastle Theatre and of others in the North. She was an excellent tragedienne, though her fame has been eclipsed by that of her sister.—W.-G.

[2] This is also the emendation in the "London Library" copy.

of which he, in fact, only wrote a few short letters, evidently very much *against the grain.*

This novel came out in the year 1780, in two small volumes, and was printed for Fielding and Walker. What terms he procured for it with the book-seller, I do not know :[1] its success was very moderate ; and it was to his own novel that Mr. Holcroft alludes, when he complains, in Hugh Trevor, that Wilmot's novel had been characterized in the Monthly Review, as "a vulgar narrative of uninteresting occurrences."[2]

The most curious part of it is the account which Mr. Holcroft has inserted of some of his own adventures as a strolling actor ; for he himself is not the *Gentleman Comedian.* He has disguised his own name under that of Hilkirk, and Alwyn is the hero of the piece. The story is as follows : Alwyn, a young man, who is patronized by a Mr. Stamford, in consequence of the friendship which had subsisted between him and Alwyn's father, who had saved his life, falls in love with Maria, the daughter of his guardian or master. His passion preys upon his

[1] Cf. *Hugh Trevor*, 3 : 183. From this novel we may judge that much unsatisfactory peddling of the MS. finally resulted in a scarcely satisfactory publishing arrangement.

[2] *The Monthly Review*, September, 1780 (63 : 233). The length and breadth of the critic's "review" was : "A vulgar narrative of uninteresting incidents in the peregrinations of a strolling player." The tone of the passage in *Hugh Trevor* gives another hint of Holcroft's inordinate vanity.

health; and, in order to conceal it from the family, and to try what absence may do towards effecting a cure, he determines to leave his patron's house, and commence comedian. Young Stamford, Maria's brother, is alone in the secret, and is the person to whom Alwyn addresses the account of his subsequent adventures. Mr. Hilkirk, on whose story our author has chosen to ingraft his own, in like manner, falls in love with his master's niece, is on this account, and for his frequenting spouting clubs and billiard rooms, discarded from his service as a clerk, and betakes himself to the stage.[1] These two romantic youths correspond together, and endeavour to console one another, by comparing their mutual mishaps—the pains of absence, poverty, and hopeless love. Alwyn proceeds to Kendal, where he is received by the inhabitants with extraordinary marks of attention; is supposed to be a gentleman in disguise; is envied by the players; and being invited to the assembly (a distinction never before allowed to any comedian), dances with a young, rich, lively widow, a West-Indian, who falls in love with him, and makes him an offer of her hand and fortune. This the youth politely declines, his affections being irrevocably engaged to another; and, in consequence of this, the lady being piqued by his refusal, enters into a plot against him in concert with one of the players (a veteran in the corps, who was offended that the part of Romeo, which he had

[1] See note 1, page 120.

played *for fifty years*, should be taken from him, and given to Alwyn). His pocket-book is searched; the name of the lady's rival is discovered; and a letter is despatched to old Stamford, informing him of the liberties which Mr. Alwyn is said to have taken with his daughter's name, and the equal presumption he had shewn in paying his addresses to the anonymous writer of the epistle. This letter, which is believed, gives a death-blow to his hopes. Maria Stamford, who has secretly returned his passion, is ashamed of her folly; the father is shocked; and the brother is incensed at the baseness and ingratitude of his friend. Another lover is now provided for Alwyn's mistress, the son of a Mr. Maitland, a rattling, thoughtless young fellow, who is not half sentimental enough for the young lady; and is accordingly rejected by her. The father of young Maitland is represented as an odd character, a half-crazy humourist, who, like the people of Laputa, makes every thing a subject of mathematical demonstration. He calculates the height and size of meteors, and is made to follow every *ignis fatuus* that he sees, through bog and briar. His graceless son ties a lantern to the house-dog's tail, and sends his father on a bootless chace after it: the dog escapes from his keeper, gets in at the library window with his meteorological apparatus about him, and sets fire to the house. Maitland-Hall is converted into a heap of ruins; and what is worse, Mr. Maitland's strong-box, containing nearly all his property, is lost. Mr. Stamford, his son, and daughter, are on a visit

there at the time; and Maria Stamford must have perished in the flames, but that Alwyn, the ungrateful, the supposed worthless Alwyn, who had left the Kendal company, and was travelling homeward, happens, at that instant, to be passing by, and comes in time to rescue his lovely mistress from the flames. He however remains unknown, and pursues his journey. Tom Maitland's fortune being thus dissipated by his frolic, it becomes a point of honour that Maria should give up her scruples, and join her hand to his; when this, now almost inevitable event, is put a stop to by a discovery—that it was not the dog Pompey that had set fire to the house, but a gang of thieves, who had committed this flagrant act in order to carry off old Maitland's strong box: that they had been detected, and their prize secured by the vigilance and activity of Alwyn's friend, Hilkirk, who now appears to be the son of his former master, Seldon, and who is rewarded with the hand of his old sweet-heart, Julia Gowland, for the difficulties he has had to encounter, and to which he was purposely exposed by his father to enable him to bear adversity, and make a man of him. At the same time, Alwyn is recognized by a rich uncle, who adopts him as his heir; the story of the anonymous letter, and of his pretended treachery, is cleared up, and the whole ends happily in marriage.

There is in this story neither much probability nor much invention. The characters, such as they are, are tolerably supported: but some of the attempts at humour which are inserted,

shock all common sense. Such are the accounts of the school-master, the methodist parson, the mathematical calculation of the reasons for marrying, &c. These however were not written by Holcroft, but by his friend. The reason, why men of real and great abilities do not succeed in different kinds of writing, is perhaps, less for want of power, than of industry and inclination. They naturally set the highest value on that department of taste or genius, to which they have devoted themselves, and they have not respect enough for any other to take the pains necessary to excel in it. Thus the philosopher and man of science is apt to think he pays a sufficient compliment to the efforts of humour or fancy, if he only unbends his mind to engage in them; that any thing is good enough for a novel, or poem; and that the absence of wisdom is wit.

The character of Handford, Alwyn's uncle, is the most amusing and original in the work: let it speak for itself.

This gentleman had conceived the idea of establishing a humane asylum for animals, the consequences of which he describes thus:

"I am pestered, plagued, teazed, tormented to death. I believe all the cats in Christendom are assembled in Oxfordshire. I am obliged to hire a clerk to pay the people, and the village where I live, is become a constant fair. A fellow has set up the sign of the three Blind Kittens, and has the impudence to tell the neighbours, that if my whims and my money only hold out for one twelve-month, he shall not care a fig

for the king. I thought to prevent this inundation, by buying up all the old cats, and secluding them in convents and monasteries of my own: but the value of the breeders is increased to such a degree, that I do not believe my whole fortune is capable of the purchase.—Besides, I am made an ass of. A rascal, who is a known sharper in these parts, hearing of the aversion I had to cruelty, bought an old, one-eyed horse, that was going to the dogs, for five shillings. Then taking a hammer in his hand, watched an opportunity of finding me alone, and addressed me in the following manner: 'Look you, master, I know that you don't love to see any dumb creature abused, and so, if you don't give me ten pounds, why I shall scoop out this old rip's odd eye, with the sharp end of this here hammer, now, before your face.' Aye, and the villain would have done it too, if I had not instantly complied: but what was worse, the abominable scoundrel had the audacity to tell me, when I wanted him to deliver the horse first, for fear he should extort a farther sum from me, that he had more honour than to break his word. A whelp of a boy had yesterday caught a young hedge-hog, and perceiving me, threw it into the water to make it extend its legs; then with the rough side of a knotty stick, sawed upon them till the creature cried like a child; and when I ordered him to desist, told me he would not, till I had given him six-pence. There is something worse than all this. The avaricious rascals, when they can find nothing that they think

will excite my pity, disable the first animal which is not dignified with the title of christian; and then bring it to me as an object worthy of commiseration; so that in fact, instead of protecting, I destroy. The women have entertained a notion that I hate two-legged animals: and one of them called after me the other day, to tell me I was an old rogue, and that I had better give my money to the poor, than keep a parcel of dogs and cats that eat up the village. I perceive it is in vain to attempt carrying on the scheme much longer, and then my poor invalids will be worse off than they were before."

This account was probably intended by the author as an indirect satire upon his friend Ritson's arguments on the inhumanity of eating animal food.[1]

Mr. Holcroft may now be considered as having

[1] In some measure *Alwyn* is characteristic of his later work. It deals with outcasts from society; accidents play a large part in the plot, especially in the dénouement; we have many a "painful, pleasing sigh of melancholy"; characters are slightly overdrawn and tend to become caricatures; the villains, Stentor and the amorous widow, are not logical creations, but types fabricated for the necessities of the moment; concealed identities, here, as in so many of Holcroft's plays, determine the plot; the narrative is episodical, with incidents well related but badly connected with one another; there is the usual person with "an armour of iambics, a shield of raillery, and a sword of satire" (*Alwyn*, I: 8); and the author is persistent in his moral preaching concerning that "pleasure which a generous and sympathetic heart receives from an occasion of exercising its benevolence" (*Alwyn*,

commenced regular author; or in other words, he now began to write constantly for the booksellers.[1] He was employed by them to write a pamphlet under the name of Wm. Vincent, Esq., of Gray's Inn, containing an account of the riots in 1780.[2] For this purpose he had attended the trials at the Old Bailey, where he was the means of saving the life of an innocent man, who was brought there as a prisoner. I have heard Mr. Holcroft mention this circumstance, with tears of pleasure at the recollection. One of his most habitual feelings was a strong sense of the value of human life; and his having been in more than one instance an instrument in saving it, was a subject of the most grateful reflection to him.

A young man was brought to the bar, and tried as one of the rioters. The witness against him swore, that as he was standing in a shop, where he had taken refuge, at the bottom of Holborn, he saw the prisoner coming down Holborn Hill, at the head of a body of rioters, with a drawn sword in his hand, which he brandished furiously in the air. The witness

2: 56). As a just result of this confusion of artistic errors, the book received condemnation at the hands of the only Review which condescended to notice it (*The Monthly Review*, September, 1780, 63: 233). In fact, its chief value lies in the autobiographical bases of some of the events and in the insight which it gives us into the life and early opinions of Holcroft himself.

[1] Cf. the Bibliography covering these years.

[2] *Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Late Riots*, for Fielding and Walker.

swore positively to the facts, and there is little doubt that the prisoner would have been found guilty, if by great good fortune Mr. Holcroft, who was taking notes of the evidence, had not recollected the prisoner's face. He felt himself much agitated while the evidence was giving; and when it was over, he addressed the judge, and begged that he might be admitted as an evidence, for that he had something very material to depose to the prisoner's innocence. He then declared that he had been present at the real transaction; that he had been standing at the corner of one of the streets near the bottom of Holborn, when the rioters passed; that the prisoner was not one of them, but that some time after they were gone by, he had seen the prisoner, who was walking quietly along the street, pick up a sword, which had probably been dropped in some scuffle by one of the rioters, and carry it away with him. This he said was the whole of the transaction, and that the circumstances of his marching at the head of the mob, and brandishing the sword in a threatening manner, were utterly false. This evidence was so clear and satisfactory, that the man was acquitted. Loughborough was the judge on this occasion.[1] Mr. Holcroft used to mention

[1] Alexander Wedderburne, successively barrister and (as Lord Loughborough) Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and Lord Chancellor. He was a strong defender of the ministry, and "a warm promoter of the persecution against Wilkes" (Notes to *The Rosciad*, II: 69 et seq., where he is roundly abused).

another anecdote which happened at the same time, when the prisoners were tried and convicted in that wholesale way, and upon such slender evidence, that it was not easy for them to escape, whether guilty or not. A man with a strong, stern, sensible countenance, after sentence of condemnation had been passed upon him, muttered to himself, in a scarcely audible voice, and evidently without intending to excite any one's notice: "Short and sweet—innocent by G—d!"[1]

[1] Those few June days were fitly described by Dr. Johnson to Mrs. Thrale as "a time of terror" (*Letters to and from the late Samuel Johnson*, London, 1788, 2: 124–134). Another remarked: "It is not strange that a madman should act madly, but that there should ever be found fools to aid him is more strange: that knaves should do it is no wonder" (*Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montague*, London, 1817, 3: 155). An interesting contemporary account appears in *The Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds, Written by Himself*, London, 1826. See also an article: "Thomas Holcroft and the Gordon Riots" in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, October, 1914, by E. Colby. Holcroft was identified with "those unhappy disturbances" (*Trial*, Advertisement) by his *Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Late Riots* and by his *Trial of the Hon. George Gordon* (newly attributed to him in my Bibliography, q.v. for further remarks on his opinions at this time). Both of these were undertaken, as such menial pamphlet accounts usually were, for bookseller's pay. That the first of these went through "several editions" in a month was the publisher's profit; that it was lauded by Lecky (*History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 3: 520) is the compiler's praise.

CHAPTER II

MR. HOLCROFT'S first comedy, called Duplicity, was acted in October, 1781. It had been offered to Mr. Harris,[1] and came out at Covent Garden. The prologue was written by Mr. Nicholson.[2] The applause it met with, both on the first night and afterwards, was very great.[3]

[1] Thomas Harris (d. 1820) was associated with Colman and others in the proprietorship and management of Covent Garden Theatre.—W.-G.

[2] Mrs. Inchbald, in the part of Melissa, did "all that was in her power to sustain Duplicity" (Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 1 : 153).

[3] Since this comedy was the first of Holcroft's plays to be regularly acted and printed, it perhaps deserves a fuller study than its reputation or its intrinsic merit would seem to warrant. The main plot runs somewhat as follows :

"Sir Harry has saved Osborne's life in Savoy. They have returned from travel together and become great friends. Osborne is on the point of marriage to Melissa, sister to Sir Harry. Sir Harry has good qualities, but they are counterbalanced by his passion for gaming. Osborne is very desirous to cure him of this folly, and for this purpose contrives, with the assistance of some sharpers, to win very large sums of money from Sir Harry. In the last act, Sir Harry has not only lost all his own property, but also his sister's fortune, and is reduced to despair. Osborne, whose real intentions have remained concealed—

Mr. Holcroft's feelings on this occasion he has

even from the audience (hence the *Duplicity*)—gives Sir Harry a very severe lecture and then restores everything to him " (extracted from Genest).

There are some striking similarities between Holcroft's *Duplicity* and Edward Moore's play, *The Gamester* (1753), acted frequently during the last half of the eighteenth century. Holcroft's Sir Harry gambles away his sister's fortune, conveniently converted ready for investment, while Moore's Stukely pawns his wife's jewels in order to sweep away the last funds available. Except for this incident, the chief similarity of Holcroft's with Moore's play is in the rôle of the gamester himself: though Moore's is a tragedy, and he makes certain of carrying conviction in his morality by not hastily reforming his villain. Moore gets his dénouement by having Bates, an apparent friend, become a real traitor; Holcroft, by having Osborne, the apparent traitor, proved a real friend. Moore reveals Bates's true character to the audience by means of soliloquies; Holcroft eschews the soliloquy, and conceals the intentions of Osborne, even from the audience, until he is ready for the final revelation. Sir Harry ruins himself, the prey to every sharper. Unable to break his friend's habit by pleading and arguing with him, Osborne ruins only to preserve, and the disclosure of his true attitude and motives is sprung as an effective surprise just when we are finally convinced of his faithlessness. Holcroft's is not so great a play, because it loses by depending upon the trick of dissimulation, and because—being a comedy—it swings along to a generally lighter touch. Yet Holcroft was serious enough in his own intentions. He stated in his preface a purpose far nobler than merely the incitement of risibility: " I would rather have the merit of driving one man from the gaming table, than of making a whole theatre merry."

expressed in a manner honourable to himself in a letter to Mr. Greville, dated October 18, the day after it was acted.

"SIR,

"I received your very obliging letter last night, just as I was going to the theatre, and had not time to answer it till to-day. Indeed, Sir, I do not find myself so much flattered by the very favourable opinion which, as far as I am able to come at the truth, the town entertains of me, as I am by your friendship and kindness. It is true I have had great difficulties to encounter, and the unhappy effects of a narrow education to surmount: but to be thus distinguished is more than a compensation for the labour I have taken, and the conflicts I have had with poverty, obscurity, and their dismal attendants. I am successful—I am happy—I shall acquire the means of making my father, my family, and some of my friends happy. These are the purest sources of pleasure, and which, as I have reason to know, both you and Mrs. Greville most intimately feel. My greatest danger is the possibility of not supporting the new character I have undertaken, with that equanimity, moderation, and ease, which are so essential to real worth. Vanity is continually spreading the net for pride, and those who are never entrapped, are either very strong or very cunning. To be successful, I have now only to be industrious: having escaped the Dog of Hell, the Elysian Fields are before me, if I have but taste and

prudence to select the sweets. But this egotism is a species of the folly I have been declaiming against."

Mr. Greville, it may be necessary to add here, had perused Mr. Holcroft's piece before it came out, and had suggested some alterations both in the plot and language. Several were also made by Mr. Holcroft in the course of the rehearsals, and more by Mr. Harris; some of them against the author's judgment.[1]

[*To Fulke Greville, Esq.*

SIR,

Before I proceed to any other subject, permit me to assure you that I not only think myself greatly honoured by your correspondence, but greatly obliged by your remarks, and more especially by the candour and liberality with which they are made. Indeed, Sir, these sensations have made too powerful an impression to be soon, or easily forgotten. Your ideas of consistency, however I may have failed, agree entirely with mine; for which reason, whenever you find absurdities or inconsistencies, I shall be glad if you will freely point them out. Your objection to the Two Knights is well founded. I will make Sir Harry, a Lord, or Sir Hornet, a Mr. ——. Vandervelt is in the same predicament. A large fortune, and the illiterate manners of Turnbull, are sufficiently improbable, unless what Osborne says, when he draws his character in the first act, reconciles it to truth. I think

[1] The following letters to Fulke Greville are transposed from their position at the end of the *Memoirs* (3: 257–71).

your hint, however, a good one, and worth attending to. If any phrases, words, or other alterations of that nature, occur to you in reading, I beg you will not scruple to write them on the blank leaf, being convinced that you have too much candour to take offence if I should happen to differ with you occasionally. If you understand that Sir Hornet sends the Turnbulls to his nephew's house as a residence, I have erred in expressing myself, and must correct. The last thing you have noticed I confess affects me a good deal. I thought I had contrived the plot so as to keep the audience in suspense relative to the real character of Osborne; if I have failed in this the error is a capital one indeed. It is true I could not make Osborne a rascal so palpably as to take away all probability of the contrary, because the mind would have been too much shocked at the want of poetical justice in the denouement; the point to be hit was that perplexity which must arise in the mind on seeing a worthy person likely to be betrayed by an unworthy one; but yet to preserve a possibility of his salvation by having a possibility of your suspicions of the supposed unworthy one ill founded. Now to certain minds who are intimately in the mechanical secret of plot and catastrophe, &c., I hardly know how this is to be effected. You, Sir, know that a comedy must end happily, because critics have made it an inevitable rule. You see as you proceed there is no way of doing this, but by making a certain character (Osborne for instance,) not what he appears to be: you foresee, therefore, this will happen, and your concern for the distress of another vanishes. But in what labyrinth shall the poet bewilder you, Sir, who are possessed of this clue. If the whole audience see as far as you, Sir, my play loses half its merit. The work in question was to be

a comedy, the auditors were to laugh; wit, humour, variety of character, of manners, of incident, were absolute requisites for a good comedy, and as entirely so as instruction and reformation from the fable and moral. The poet's attention must, therefore, inevitably be divided; he must bestow a part on each. If the catastrophe of my play is not more moral, more forcible, and more affecting, than that of any late production, it is worse than any of them, because the plot has greater capabilities, but the nature of the work would not permit it to be as much so as if it had had but one whole and undivided intention, that is, as if it had been a Tragedy. Do not imagine, Sir, that I am seized with the irritability of authorship; whenever I am chagrined it will be at myself for committing errors, not at others for telling me of them. I am afraid there is truth in your objection, though I confess I have been told by some readers they were entirely at a loss concerning the catastrophe till it happened: but it is evident they either said false, or were less discerning than you. Continue, Sir, to tell me truth. They will not flatter me at the Theatre: I will retrieve my errors where I can. I am concerned, however, Sir, at giving you the labour of writing, you will be in town soon; or at Petersham, I shall be proud to wait on you; you will give me your opinion with greater ease: I find already it will be of much service to me, and I repeat, I think myself greatly honoured, and indebted to that philanthropy which could prompt you so cheerfully to the present undertaking.

I am, Sir, &c.

September 4th.]

[*To Fulke Greville, Esq.*

SIR,

I have this moment received and read your last letter: your attention to me is not only an honour to me, but to yourself, Sir; it expresses the anxiety of a generous mind. I continue to think that your suggestion of Osborne's gratitude is a very happy improvement, and as such have endeavoured to give it all the expression and force I could from the mouth of Osborne. As to Sir Harry, he appears to me to be so over-flowing with passion, that is, the turn is so sudden and unexpected, and he is so affected with Osborne's friendship and virtue in disguise, and at the hideous danger he had just escaped, that, if I feel right, he *cannot* speak, except in exclamation. The difficulty of making impassioned characters say neither too little nor too much is, as you observe, exceedingly great: and the plot frequently obliges the author to say too much; but it never fails in some degree to offend. I confess, Sir, you almost terrify me about the loss of Melissa's fortune, but I have no remedy; the reason is what I gave you in our last conversation. Mr. Nicholson says, were it not done, he confesses he would not do it; and yet, as it is at present managed, the effect is such that he can scarcely wish it undone; nor does he seem to think there is much risk in it. He approved your before-mentioned hint concerning Osborne's gratitude, exceedingly, and thought it very happy. I don't know how enough to thank you for your kind offers concerning the prologue; but Mr. Nicholson is at present about one, and had begun it before I received your letter; how far it may succeed in mine or Mr. Harris's opinion, I cannot yet predict; but I am under no disagreeable concern on that subject, because I know Mr. Nicholson's candour

and good sense so well as to be certain, should it not chance to be happy, he will not suffer the least chagrin; not to mention, Sir, that I should be exceedingly sorry again to subject your performance to the caprice, or ill taste, of others, to which I myself, in this business, am entirely subjected. I have not yet seen Mr. Henderson: he was out of town.

I am, &c.

T. H.]

SIR, [*To the same*

I am very much concerned at not knowing where or which way to remit the copy of the comedy to you, being ignorant of where you are, or where this may find you. I went on Tuesday with it into Somerset Street, but found the house entirely shut up. The trouble you have taken in reading and advising, demands every attention from me. It is to be played on Saturdy the 13th. If you come to town, or can instruct me how to send the comedy to you, I shall be happy. I assure you, Sir, you can scarcely conjecture the trouble and chagrin attending things of this nature: there have been three epilogues written before there was one to please the speaker; and at this instant, I am not certain of finding any person to speak the prologue. Mr. Henderson said he could not please himself in it, and therefore declined it: and Mr. Lee Lewis, to whom it was afterwards given, who fancies himself a wit and a critic, does not find opportunities enough of regaling his acquaintance in the upper gallery; whether he will or will not speak it, is yet to be determined.[1]

[1] For further comment on alterations, actor's jealousies, and managerial inattention, see *Hugh Trevor*, 3: 177. The prologue, written by Nicholson, was finally spoken by Mr. Lee Lewis. Cf. published play.

There have been various alterations made in the play, and a very considerable one relative to the loss of Melissa's fortune, though your objection is not entirely obviated. I have written a speech for Sir Harry, on the effects of gaming, as consonant to the ideas you hinted as I could; and I believe it will have a charming effect. Your turn too for the denouement is exceedingly happy. I can only add, Sir, that I think myself exceedingly obliged to you for these favours, and shall take the earliest opportunity when you are in town, with your permission, of thanking you in person. I am, Sir, &c.]

[*To the same*

SIR,

I am exceedingly happy that you do not suspect me of ingratitude: indeed, Sir, I should detest myself had I, by my own neglect, treated you with the least disrespect. It would have been a symptom not only of an inflated, silly mind, but of a bad heart also. I repeat this, Sir, because I assure you I was very uneasy till the receipt of your obliging letter removed my doubts. I cannot help again observing to you, Sir, that the approbation of people of known worth and undoubted abilities is very flattering; and I hope there will be nothing wrong or indelicate in saying that I feel myself peculiarly happy and elevated at having gained the esteem of Mr. and Mrs. Greville; and I am certain I shall neglect no opportunity of endeavouring to improve a friendship so honourable to me, and, at one period of my life, so seemingly incompatible. I know, Sir, the most effectual mode of accomplishing this will be to do my duty in society, and assiduously to cultivate such talents as accident or nature has bestowed upon me; and this, Sir, is my most serious

intention. Respecting the play, I, Sir, was never satisfied with making Sir Harry lose his sister's fortune; besides that I find it is an incident in the tragedy of the Gamester, where, as the hero does not survive the dishonour, it is very proper and happy. However, as few are sufficiently refined to feel properly on this occasion, it has a good stage effect. You can hardly conceive how great the effect of the denouement was on the first night, the whole house seemed taken by surprise; and Osborne's generous account of the reason of his conduct greatly heightened, or rather gave a complete finish to their pleasure. There is another speech, which was written in consequence of some hints I received from conversing with you, which I think one of the best conceived in the whole play. It is Sir Harry's soliloquy in the fourth act, after Melissa has put her fortune in his hands. I very much approve what you are pleased to term the niceties of verbal criticism. An exact and well regulated machine depends as much, if not more, upon small things, as great; but still there must be vast labour and precision indeed, if no particle of dust insinuates itself among the cogs and wheels; however, when such is discovered, it would be folly not to brush it away. The epilogue I wrote, and it has a good effect in speaking. The curtailings have some of them been suggested at rehearsals by the performers, and some were my own, but the greatest part were Mr. Harris's. I dislike Sir Harry's squeezing Clara's hand, as much as you can do, I assure you, Sir, it was the insertion of the actors: and I chose rather to submit to that, and many other things I disapprove, than to appear obstinate or opinionated. Mrs. Holcroft desires me to assure you, Sir, she is exceedingly obliged by the kind mention you have made of her, and only wishes it were possible to have an

opportunity of expressing her gratitude in actions both to you and Mrs. Greville: but this she despairs of.

Oct. 28.] I am, Sir, &c.

Mr. Holcroft now considered his fame as established, and his fortune as already made. The author of a successful and admired comedy he thought had a passport which would carry him securely through the world. In these flattering hopes, he was unhappily deceived.

He also wrote on the same day [October 18] to his father, in terms which his success and the warmth of his affection dictated.

"My Dear Father,

"I know that a short letter will be acceptable to you rather than none, especially on this occasion. My piece is come out at Covent Garden Theatre under the title of Duplicity. You may perhaps have heard some account of its reception from the newspapers: its success has been very flattering, and no circumstance relative to it gives me more satisfaction than that I shall now be enabled to provide for my dear father."

Only three days after the date of the preceding letter, his brilliant prospects were dissipated, and we find him addressing the following letter to Mr. Harris:

"Sir,

"It is with reluctance I begin to write to you on the present subject: but my feelings

are too powerful to be resisted. My labours have been great; my cares, hopes, and fears innumerable, and just at the moment when I was to be rewarded, to see my golden dreams vanish, to have the blessings I had so hardly earned snatched from me, is more than I can support in silence. It is now, Sir, vanity in me to say the comedy is deserving of reward, every body says so, many say much more, at least to me. Had it been brought out at a good time of the year, I should not have gained less than five hundred pounds by it. But to be played at the most barren of all seasons, and when the fineness of the weather concurs to make it still worse, is certainly a severe fate; and I appeal to you, Sir, whether it is a misfortune, the whole weight of which should be borne by a man who has strained every faculty, and endured every kind of mental torture to give others pleasure. Again, though I have no doubt but you thought it best, yet it is the opinion of every body that the playing the piece at intervals, so contrary to the established mode, has thrown a damp upon it of the most stagnating kind. There is not a person I meet, who does not ask the reason with a face of wonder. This you know was not with my judgment, nay, I was exceedingly vexed when I first saw another play advertised over its head.[1] What added still more to the

[1] *The English Review*, January, 1783 (1: 76), says, "well received, but not allowed to take its run." The premier of another piece was previously announced for the next night.

surprise of the town, was to hear it given out for Tuesday, and to see it put off till Wednesday, in order to give place to an old piece, of which they therefore concluded you had greater expectations than of the new comedy. They could not know your real motive. The concluding stroke thus far finishes this melancholy tragedy. You told me my night should be on the Friday or Saturday; I objected to the first, and you agreed to the other: but circumstances alter—you allege the business of the theatre—I am obliged to take the Friday, and King Arthur,[1] with every force of novelty, dress, decoration, &c., &c., is opposed to me at a time when there is scarcely one full audience of play-going people in town. The consequence is, the profits of my first and best night are twenty pounds. I appeal to you, Sir, whether I have not a claim to some reparation. I wish you to allow me a certain sum for my nights; what, I leave to your candour. My hopes are so lowered that my views now are not very extravagant. If you think I have reason, you will be kind enough to inform me what you think proper to give; and then, Sir, you will do with the piece whatever you think fit." [2]

[1] Probably Dryden's (1691).—W.-G.

[2] These facts are corroborated by the account books of the Covent Garden Theatre (British Museum, *Egerton MSS.* 2283, fol. 11–25), where the piece was played to small receipts on Sat., Wed., Frid., and Tues., Oct. 13, 17, 19, and 30, and Thurs. and Tues., Nov. 1 and 6. Cf. also *Hugh Trevor*, 3: 205, and preface to *Seduction*. Its

The next night that the comedy was played for the author's benefit, it did not clear the expenses of the house; and Mr. Harris then said, that unless it was commanded by the king, he should not think of playing it any more; but, at the same time, desired Mr. Holcroft to draw on the theatre for a hundred pounds.[1] This sum, with the price which he got for it from the bookseller, was all that he cleared by this his first comedy. It was shortly after published with a very well written preface.[2]

Mr. Harris appears to have behaved in a liberal and friendly manner on this occasion. Mr. Holcroft afterwards called on him, and he proposed

success was far less than that of the Count of Narbonne, the same season.

[1] One other performance was given, however, to good receipts, with the pantomime *Choice of Harlequin* on Friday, Dec. 28, 1781.

[2] The really significant fact about this play is that by its success it encouraged Holcroft to quit the boards altogether, to set up as a writer of dramas instead of remaining an actor of them. Without *Duplicity* we should not have had *The Road to Ruin*, nor the famous pilfering of the *Follies of a Day*. *Duplicity* marks the end of the acting period: 1777–1781. For further remarks on this matter, see my Bibliography. *The European Magazine* for December, 1792 (22: 404) contains the following: "We gave an account of this writer in the year 1782 (Vol. I, p. 48). In the winter of that year he quitted the theatre at Drury-lane, and has not since appeared on any stage. (The Editor recollects having seen him in the character of Figaro, on the first appearance of The Follies of a Day.)"

that the play should be laid by for a time, till he had a strong after piece to play with it. This set Mr. Holcroft's imagination to work again, and he conceived the idea of writing a pastoral, and laying the scene in Ireland, so as to have an opportunity of introducing all the good Irish music. I do not know whether he ever executed this idea.

After the appearance of Duplicity, Mr. Holcroft wrote to Mr. Linley [1] to decline singing in the choruses and oratorios. His salary had been raised by Mr. Sheridan to two pounds a week, but still Mr. Holcroft seems to have been dissatisfied with not being brought forward in considerable parts; and he entertained thoughts of going to Ireland as an actor, unless a more respectable class of characters was assigned him at the theatre. He seems to have thought it inconsistent, not only with his dignity, but with his interest, as an author, to appear only in the lowest and most insignificant parts. I ought to have mentioned above, that when his own play of Duplicity was acted at the other house, Mr. Wewitzer being taken ill, he had played the part of Vandervelt at an hour's notice, which he continued to do afterwards. He also tried to procure an engagement with Mr. Colman [2] this year at the Haymarket, but I believe ineffectually.

[1] Thomas Linley (1732–1795) was associated with Sheridan in Drury Lane Theatre. He superintended the music. Sheridan married his daughter Elizabeth Ann.—W.-G.

[2] George Colman (1732–1794) took over the Haymarket from Foote in 1776.—W.-G.

A project, which about this time engaged a good deal of Mr. Holcroft's attention, and excited very sanguine hopes in him, was the pretended discovery of the polygraphic art. The person who set this plan on foot, as we have before noticed, was Booth, the manager of one of the theatrical companies to which Mr. Holcroft had belonged. He undertook, by some mechanical process, to produce copies of the old masters, such as Titian and Rubens, which, both in colour and execution, should not be distinguishable from the originals, and which were to be sold as cheap, or cheaper, than a common coloured print. This certainly was promising great things, if the performance had been answerable. Mr. Holcroft was so full of this scheme, and of the golden advantages it held out, that Booth having applied to him to assist him in it, and become a partner in the profits, he wrote to Mr. Greville, informing him of his sudden good fortune; and indeed offering him a share in so lucrative an undertaking. Mr. Greville, however, seems to have thought the success not so certain; and it was not long before Mr. Holcroft began to incline to his opinion. In his next letter to this gentleman, he confesses that he entertained some doubts on the subject, especially since he had heard that the same scheme had been tried before, and had failed; and farther, that they were not half a dozen artists in the kingdom, *who could copy the best pictures well enough to make it an object.* In fact, this last observation betrayed the real secret:

after an imperfect outline, or rude sketch, had been struck off by a mechanical operation, any bungling artist, who could be found to do it cheap enough, was employed to finish the picture. So that, after all, this new mode of superseding the necessity of copying the old masters, was nothing more than an attempt to set up a cheap wholesale manufactory of bad copies of good pictures.—Mr. Holcroft, however, though his ardour very soon cooled, was willing to wait till he had seen the specimen which Mr. Booth was busy in making of some famous picture, but which he was very backward in producing. The subsequent fate of this polygraphic scheme is well known to the public. To excuse Mr. Holcroft's credulity on this occasion, it may be remarked, that it was long before he had paid any particular attention to the subject of painting; that he was really and truly a novice in the art; and, probably, would not have been much struck himself with the difference between one of these polygraphic imitations and a real Titian or Rubens.

CHAPTER III

IN the year 1783, Mr. Holcroft published a poem called *Human Happiness, or* the Sceptic, and the Family Picture, a collection of tales, partly compiled, and partly original. Neither of these works seems to have held a very high place in his estimation. The Family Picture, I think, from memory, was published by Lockyer Davis, and the Sceptic afterwards.[1] The latter work has no plan, but in some parts it shews a more extensive power of imagination and strength of general induction, than he had before exhibited in any of his writings.—The colloquial language of the connecting parts of his Family Picture, is poor and inelegant; and has none of that easy, clear, and unaffected spirit which characterizes his Tales of the Castle, and still more his Hugh Trevor.[2] Of *Human Happiness*, he says, in a letter to a friend, that it was written in haste; that he believes it ought to have been treated according to Horace's maxim, "Prematur nonum in annum"; and that though he was pleased with some parts in the writing, he is

[1] For reasons for the correction of the title and these dates see my Bibliography.

[2] These last two sentences originally appeared as a footnote by Hazlitt.

afraid he should not be so in the reading of them. Of the tales in *The Family Picture* he says, that he did not expect to increase his reputation by them, though he hoped he should not lessen it.[1]

[1] Whatever Holcroft thought of his ability as a poet when he wrote *Human Happiness, or the Skeptic*, he tried no more of the same thing. Pamphlet poems in clumsy imitation of Pope were common in the eighteenth century. Holcroft himself wrote:

"You've read, no doubt, for who has not?
Who reads not Pope?" (*Human Happiness*, p. 19.)

And Holcroft showed good sense in avoiding further production of this sort. Perhaps he convinced himself by his own words, when he characterized and ridiculed the poet who "counts his feet upon his fingers," who can

"Beat his brow and curse his fate,
And rub his eyes, and scratch his pate, . . .
Then strait unbuttons he his doublet,
To hammer out unmeaning couplet."

We had best agree that

"In many cases men of sense
Know silence is good eloquence,"

and say little of the bad verses, the impossible rhymes, the distorted word order, or the long-winded arguments. The single thing about this poem requiring mention is the curious incongruity between his later well-known principles and the way in which he here attacks political agitators and their campaigning, possibly "Jack" Wilkes and his "patriotic" friends:

"But should you from these fumes of reason
Subtract hems, epithets, and treason;
Of all this wondrous waste of brains
You'd quickly find that naught remains."

And, strange to say, Holcroft seems at that time really

About this time an offer was made him by Mr. Greville to reside in his house, which he had the good sense respectfully to decline. He observed, that it was difficult for people with the best tempers and intentions, and who are upon a perfect equality, to live together, without harbouring little disgusts, or fancying supposed neglects; and that with respect to himself, he was conscious of whims and peculiarities which it was his duty to keep behind the curtain as much as possible. His sole reason, therefore, for declining Mr. Greville's offer, he declared, was the fear of declining in his good opinion by accepting it.

His mind now teemed with dramatic projects, plots, characters, and incidents. His ambition was to write elegant comedy; and he was sensible of the disadvantages under which he laboured in this respect, both from education, and the sphere of life in which he had hitherto chiefly moved. He wished to get a nearer and more intimate view of the manners of high life, that he might be able to describe its refinements, or ridicule its absurdities, with more effect. He also wished, for the same reason, to acquaint himself, by actual observation, with foreign

to have been opposed to the reformers, for it was to these very lines that he referred in the later letter to the Earl of Shelburne (later Lord Lansdowne). We must, then, conclude that he finally changed his views, or that his attitude of this period was only assumed in order to obtain a position in the Paris Embassy, for he clearly said in that letter: "I wish well to Government."

manners. Both these ends would be answered by obtaining admission into the Ambassador's suite, which was then (1783) setting off for Paris; and he made application to several persons of consequence for this purpose, but without obtaining his immediate object. He however so far succeeded as to obtain some respectable introductions abroad.

Lord Carmarthen was at first talked of as Ambassador; and Mr. Holcroft, by the interest of Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Greville, had an interview with his lordship; in which he was informed, that another person had been fixed upon to go to Paris. This was the Duke of Manchester; and he now applied to the Duchess of Devonshire, I believe through Mrs. Siddons, for a recommendation to the Duke to go out with him as under-secretary, or in any other situation, in which he might be of service as a literary man. He stated that a salary was not his object, and that his only motive was to gain some little knowledge of the manners of a court, and of foreign countries. The only advantage he reaped from this application was, that he obtained the honour of some commissions to execute for her Grace at Paris, and the notice of one or two persons of consequence while he was there.

One of his letters, written to the Earl of Shelburne, seeking such a position is preserved:

[My Lord, Jany. 27, 1783.

Although I was not happy enough to attract your Lordship's notice in my former address I am still so

desirous of that favour that I cannot refrain from once more making the attempt—Accident might intervene—you might forget—you might want greater proof of my ability.

I have written a poem & take the liberty to send your Lordship a copy—I can hardly flatter myself you should have leisure or perhaps inclination to read the whole but if your Lordship will but do me the favour to begin at the paragraph page 22 and (*sic*) proceed to the end of the Canto you will at least perceive that I wish well to Government—how far I have the power to express that wish with energy you will judge.

Permit me to claim your Lordship's attention for a moment—I explained in my former letter the obscurity of my origin—my want of friends—of education—with the numerous difficulties I had to encounter—Surely, my Lord, it is consistent with the feelings of Benevolence—with your Lordship's feelings—to stretch forth the hand and assist him who with a uniform Fortitude pursues the best of purposes by the best of means—Let me beg your Lordship so far to interest yourself in my behalf as to recommend me to whoever shall be appointed Ambassador to the Court of France that I may be taken into his suit either as an under secretary or any other office I am capable of—I am anxious, not to obtain a great income, but, an opportunity of seeing Men and Manners—Let me intreat—let me conjure your Lordship to do me this kindness—Your Lordship may depend on my fidelity and unremitting assiduity to serve whoever confides in me—I have too much pride as well as principle either to be neglectful or betray a trust and my greatest pleasure is to flatter that pride by exerting myself to repay an obligation.—Do not—pray do not

my Lord overlook this poor request—Surely I could be some way serviceable and I do not expect any lucrative post, my object is simply what I have said—Let me however above all things pray your Lordship to say ay or no as I must endeavour to obtain my purpose by some other means if your Lordship should think proper or be obliged to deny me—I know not whether I could get admitted to your Lordship's Levee. I know not the etiquette, nor, if I were there, should I have any person to introduce me; let me therefore intercede with your Lordship to order some one just only to write me a denial, if a denial *must* be given, if not to instruct me how to proceed—Condescend for a moment to listen to the voice of Philanthropy and make me still further by the strong ties of gratitude.

Your Lordship's most obedient and respectful humble servant.

T. Holcroft.

No. 46—Upper Marylebone Street near Howland Street. [1]]

To dance attendance on the great seems, at this period of his life, to have been very much Mr. Holcroft's fate; but it certainly was an office for which he was by nature but indifferently fitted.[2] In the present instance, his chief solicitude was to obtain an insight into the character and pursuits of the fashionable world. The

[1] Text taken from the MSS. in the library of Lord Lansdowne, "Correspondence, H., No. 50." With his Lordship's kind permission.

[2] This paragraph originally appeared as a footnote, but seems to deserve prominent and readable position.

ordeal he went thro' for this purpose, must frequently have been a severe one to his feelings. But as far as his present object was concerned, even the repulses he met with, or the distance at which he was kept, would still in some measure advance him towards the end he had in view. He seems to have profited by his experience, and has left several likely sketches of that part of the manners of the great, which relates to their intercourse with men of letters. I do not know that the following picture is true in all its particulars, but the general *feelings* it describes, were suggested to him by the reception he met with on his application to the Duchess of Devonshire.

"On another occasion, an actress, who, strange to tell, happened, very deservedly, to be popular; and whom, before she arrived at the dignity of a London theatre, I had known in the country, recommended me to a duchess. To this duchess I went day after day; and day after day was subjected for hours to the prying, unmannered insolence of her countless lacqueys. This time she was not yet stirring, though it was two o'clock in the afternoon; the next, she was engaged with an Italian vender of artificial flowers; the day after, the prince, and the devil does not know who beside, were with her; and so on, till patience and spleen were at daggers drawn. At last, from the hall I was introduced to the drawing-room, where I was half amazed to find myself. Could it be real? Should I, after all, see a creature so elevated; so unlike the poor compendium of flesh and blood with

which I crawled about the earth? Why, it was to be hoped that I should! Still she did not come; and I stood fixed, gazing at the objects around me, longer perhaps than I can now well guess. The carpet was so rich, that I was afraid my shoes would disgrace it! The chairs were so superb, that I should insult them by sitting down! The sofas swelled in such luxurious state, that for an author to breathe upon them would be contamination! I made the daring experiment of pressing with a single finger upon the proud cushion, and the moment the pressure was removed, it rose again with elastic arrogance; an apt prototype of the dignity it was meant to sustain. Though alone, I blushed at my own littleness! Two or three times the familiars of the mansion skipped and glided by me; in at this door, and out of that; seeing, yet not noticing me. It was well they did not, or I should have sunk with the dread of being mistaken for a thief, that had gained a furtive entrance, to load himself with some parcel of the magnificence, that to poverty appeared so tempting! This time, however, I was not wholly disappointed: I had a sight of the duchess, or rather a glimpse. 'Her carriage was waiting. She had been so infinitely delayed by my lord and my lady, and his highness, and Signora!—Was exceedingly sorry!—Would speak to me another time, to-morrow at three o'clock, but not a moment to spare at present, and so vanished!' Shall I say she treated me proudly, and made me feel my insignificance?

No; the little that she did say was affable; the tone was conciliating, the eye encouraging, and the countenance expressed the habitual desire of conferring kindness. But these were only aggravating circumstances, that shewed the desirableness of that intercourse which to me was unattainable. I say to me, for those who had a less delicate sense of propriety, who were more importunate, more intruding, and whose forehead was proof against repulse, were more successful. By such people she was besieged; on such she lavished her favours, till report said that she impoverished herself; for a tale of distress, whether feigned or real, if obtained upon her, she knew not how to resist."—Hugh Trevor, Vol. iii.

Mr. Holcroft being still determined on a visit to the continent, procured an engagement with the editor of a newspaper, the Morning Herald, to send over paragraphs, relating to the events of the day, public amusements, fashions, etc., for which he was to have a guinea and a half a week; and a similar engagement with a printer, Mr. John Rivington,[1] to furnish him with notices of new works, translations, &c. It was so arranged, that his salary from the newspaper office should be received by Mrs. Holcroft in his absence, for the immediate use of the family, and Rivington was to supply him with money for his expenses at Paris.

Mr. Holcroft's family consisted, at this time,

[1] See Hazlitt's note (No. 1 p. 264). The publisher's name was also John.—W.-G.

of his wife and four children, only one of whom, Fanny, was by his present wife. Ann, the eldest, was by his first wife, and Sophy and William were by his second wife, whom he lost just before he left the country.

The two children, after her death, were for some time under the care of their uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Tipler, at Nottingham. When Mr. Holcroft became settled in Southampton Buildings, they were sent for up to town. The boy William was his greatest favourite: he was now (1783) between nine and ten years old; he was a very forward and intelligent child, could speak French with tolerable fluency, and his father, in order to perfect him in the language, determined to take him with him, and afterwards to leave him at a boarding-school in France.

Matters being thus arranged, Mr. Holcroft set out for Paris in the beginning of April, 1783, which place he reached a few days after. The first appearance of this capital does not seem to have answered his expectations. He complained of the narrowness and dirtiness of the streets, of the meanness of the shops, and of the unfinished state of the principal public buildings.

[A letter written a little later, 1784, may well be inserted here.]

[*To Mr. Freeman*

DEAR SIR,

I received yours of the 25th in due course, and have forborne to answer it till now, because I had not money to pay any part of the account before; as soon as I go out to-day I shall pay ten pounds in part to Mr.

Ellis, and hope to pay as much more in a few weeks; should you think this too tardy, be kind enough to hint as much, and I will endeavour to quicken my motions. Had I any means of conveyance, I would send you a book just published (by me) in French and English, very curious,—"Memoires de Voltaire écrits par lui-même." If you will be kind enough in your next to inform me who in London sends you parcels oftenest, I can take occasion now and then to send you such trifles as I have any concern in. We complain in London of literary envy among literary men, and often with reason; but our men of letters are far behind those of France in that particular; parties there are as high among the learned, as here among politicians. Their passions are sudden, their wit keen, and their tongues imprudent; all these must have exercise, and as they dare not, like us, talk of beheading prime ministers, tell kings they are fools, and regulate the affairs of nations; they are all judges of wit, taste, poetry, and the belles lettres; and much in the same proportion as we are of politics: that is to say, there are a thousand who affirm and dogmatize, for one who discriminates and judges with temperance and taste. Their authors of the present century, who have been famous, are most of them dead or old, and they themselves say they have little hopes from any of the rising generation: but this is a commonplace complaint of all ages, and I have no doubt is without foundation now as heretofore. Notwithstanding their universal pretensions to dispute and decide in works of wit and taste, the common people are very ignorant and ill-educated, insomuch that you will see, in the best streets of Paris, the inscriptions on the signs frequently misspelt; which is matter of astonishment to an Englishman, who seldom

sees such a thing even on a village chandler's shop sign. I have written the above sketch in obedience to a wish expressed in your last; it is hasty and slight, for I am pressed at present for time, as indeed I generally am. My father is at present in Manchester; but he has taken a cottage in Cheshire, whither he and his wife are going in a few days. In his last he desired me to give his kindest love and sincerest thanks to you and your family, for all your kindness and goodness to him; he likewise wishes to know who is Mr. F——'s successor, and if it is necessary he should come to Bath at the expiration of his lease. A line when you have leisure, Sir, will be very acceptable to your sincere friend, and obliged humble servant,

T. H.[1]]

His chief attention, however, was directed to the discovery of new publications, of several of which he proposed translations to Rivington, most of which he afterwards executed for another bookseller.[2] Among these were the Tales of the Castle, by Madam Genlis, Caroline of Lichtfield, The Amours of Peter the Long, Memoirs of De Tott, Savary's Travels in Egypt, An Account of the Manners and Treatment of Animals, by D'Obsonville, &c.[3] This last publication he recommends as a curious work in a letter to Mr. Greville; and observes, that from the

[1] Taken from the *Memoirs*, 3: 273–6.

[2] Cf. *Register of the Times*, 20 October, 1794 (2: 4).

[3] I relegate to a footnote a disconnected sentence originally at the end of this paragraph: "Most, if not all, of these translations, were done for the Robinsons."

account there given, it is evident that the Newmarket jockeys had learned the first principles of their art from the Arabs. His translation of the Tales of the Castle went through several editions, and introduced Mr. Holcroft to a correspondence, and afterwards to a personal acquaintance with the authoress.

[Here we will insert an interesting letter relative to some of his work as promoter of Continental literature in England.]

[*To Madame de Genlis* [1]

I have received your favor, Madam, and am happy to find the books came safe to hand. As to the retrenchments you are pleased to notice, I will not pretend to justify either my own false delicacy, or that of my nation; but I can affirm, that be it false or true, it exists, and that to an English reader, I have done the book a service, and no injury. A person of your genius, Madam, need not appeal to the approbation of journalists (I speak generally); however, if that were any consolation, I can likewise plead their support on this very subject, as you will see if you will please to read the Critical Review for February last; but I would rather have given *you* satisfaction, Madam, than fifty Reviewers. You may well imagine, Madam, I acted for the good of the work, according to the best of my judgment, but I will by no means presume that judgment infallible.—Permit me, Madam, to relate a short story.—A certain young nobleman was remarkable for the elegance of his dress, the

[1] Originally printed at the end of the *Memoirs* (3: 280–5).

symmetry of his person, and the refinement of his manners. The old ladies admired him, the young ladies loved him, and even the handsomest among the men envied him. He was the chief inventor of modes, the leader of fashions, and the arbiter of taste and tailors: above all, he was remarkable for a fine head of hair. Proud of his power, and conscious of his abilities, his ambition was insatiable. One day, while waiting for his hair-dresser, he happened by some odd accident to be turning over the leaves of a folio, in which he saw engravings of Eastern habits—he burst into a laugh.—What strange figures, cried he! how little do they understand of grace and elegance! were I among them, I would soon teach them better. Full of this idea, and urged by a thirst of a still superior fame, he determined to take a voyage to China, in order to begin by humanizing and converting that vast empire to the principles of good taste. Arrived at Pekin, and being a master of his art, his first endeavour was to gain the suffrages of the fair sex: to effect this, he assailed, and hoped to captivate the daughter of a Mandarine, acknowledged to be the greatest beauty in all Pekin, and, as her admirers daily swore, in all the world. Much depended on a first impression, and this he knew: he therefore paired his nails and powdered his hair, and some add (perhaps maliciously) painted his cheeks. Full of the remembrance of former celebrity, and elate with the consciousness of present perfection, he walked up to the glass, admired the image it reflected, and with the step of ease and self-approbation, called for his palanquin and proceeded on his visit. Thus prepossessed, I need not describe his surprise and chagrin, when instead of meeting the approbation he thought so certain, he heard the beauteous Chinese, though struck

with his fine form (for proportion must ever please) find fault with that European art—that taste, which he had held so irresistible: the smart short cut of his clothes suffered a thousand ridiculous comparisons; and his frizzed and powdered hair, so bushy and so full, afforded endless laughter. A circumstantial detail is needless. The European, when he beheld the Chinese in their own country, and in great numbers, did not find their fashions so absurd as he thought them in an engraving. He fell desperately in love with the Mandarine's daughter, soon consented to cut off his fine hair, except a single lock, to let his nails grow, and wear a long vest; for without such condescension he found it impossible to win the affection of his mistress—that is, he translated himself into Chinese. Truth and nature are the same in all countries, but the mode of decoration varies in each.—This I hope, Madam, will be sufficient apology for any occasional liberties I may have taken with your very estimable work; and which, notwithstanding, I believe few people think more highly of than I do, because few have studied its numerous excellences with such minute attention. There is a new edition now in the press, and I shed tears daily over the proofs as I read. I shall receive the favor of your "Theatre d'Education," with the respect and thanks such a present, coming from such a person, deserves.

I am: Madam, &c.

T. H.]

Mr. Holcroft made several friends at Paris, the chief of whom were Mercier,[1] and a Mr.

[1] Louis Sebastien Mercier (1740–1814), author of many dramas. His *The Year* 2500 (2440 in French) was published in 1772. He was a supporter of the Revolution.—W.-G.

Bonneville[1] (the translator of the Theatre Allemand), of whom he had a high opinion; but Bonneville afterwards came to England, and they quarrelled. Of Mercier, the celebrated author of the Dramas, and *The Year* 2500, there will be occasion to speak hereafter. Either through these friends, or through the letters he brought with him, he was introduced to several persons of rank and literary pretension. Among them were the Duke and Duchess of Chartres, the Count de Catuelan, the Chevalier Macdonald, the Marquis de Dampiere, and others. He was desired by the Duke and Duchess of Chartres to read some scenes of Shakspeare to themselves and friends, with which he says they seemed more than satisfied.[2] He appears afterwards to have entered into some discussion with the Count de Catuelan with respect to the comparative merits of Shakspeare and the French poets; for on the 24th of June, he addressed a short note to the Count, with a poem enclosed, on this subject. I shall here insert both, as well to show the zeal with which Mr. Holcroft

[1] Nicholas de Bonneville, a poet of the revolution (1760–1828) and a student of German literature. *Nouveau Theatre Allemand* (12 vols.), 1782–5.—W.-G. Cf. for the importance of this friendship in Holcroft's literary activities, article on "Questions of Authorship," *Modern Language Notes*, December, 1914. See also: Ph. Le Harivel, *Nicolas de Bonneville*.

[2] There is a reference to this reading from Macbeth in *Travels from Hamburg to Paris* (2: 215).

defended his great countryman while abroad, as for the sake of the manner in which it is done.

"SIR,

"The conversation we had on Sunday morning concerning Rouseau, Voltaire, Shakspeare, &c., started an idea as I was returning home, which I immediately put into the form you see. I would not have you suppose, Sir, I mean to depreciate the talents of Voltaire; that is far from my intention; I would only vindicate the poet who of all others within my sphere of knowledge, and as far as my judgment extends, is infinitely the greatest. I should have sent you the verses before, because I know your reverence for my favourite bard,[1] but that I kept them to see if after sleeping two or three nights I still thought them fit to be read. I am yet in doubt; for any thing middling on such a subject is contemptible. However, I have not yet shewn them to any person, except you, Sir, and Mr. Bonneville, at whose lodgings they were written.

"Clad in the wealthy robes his genius wrought,
In happy dreams was gentle Shakspeare laid;
His pleas'd soul wand'ring through the realms of thought,
While all his elves and fairies round him play'd.

Voltair approach'd—strait fled the quaint-eyed band,
For Envy's breath such sprites may not endure:

[1] The Count was at the head of that party in France, who either did, or affected to, admire Shakspeare.—Hazlitt.

He pilfer'd many a gem with trembling hand ;
Then stabb'd the bard to make the theft secure.

Ungrateful man ! Vain was thy black design :
Th' attempt and not the deed thy hand defiled.
Preserv'd by his own charms and spells divine,
Safely the gentle Shakspeare slept and smiled."

The conception of this little allegorical fiction, is certainly a very happy one, and the execution is no less spirited and elegant. With respect however to the enthusiasm with which Englishmen generally endeavour to persuade foreigners of the superlative excellence of our great dramatist, unless where it is taken up in self-defence, it is undoubtedly a species of quixotism and of the most hopeless kind.

The remittances which Mr. Holcroft was to receive from his employer, were not so regular as he had expected. Indeed there seems to have been some unaccountable neglect on the part of Rivington,[1] and Mr. Holcroft would have

[1] It was not Rivington, the Bookseller, but John Rivington, the Printer, of St. John's Square, who died about the time of Mr. Holcroft's return, or (I believe) before it. He was one of the sons of Mr. Rivington, then bookseller, of St. Paul's Church Yard, whose other sons still carry on the business of bookselling. Mr. John Rivington engaged in an agreement, or adventure, with Mr. Holcroft, that works were to be selected, and translated by him, and published for their joint and equal account, he (Mr. Rivington) advancing money to Mr. Holcroft, as a loan for his expenses.—The reason why he was not punctual in his remittances was, that he was much

been reduced to very great distress, had it not been for the generous assistance afforded him by his friend Bonneville, who was himself in no very affluent circumstances. He was at last wearied out with the state of suspense and dependence in which he was kept, and in October 1783 he took the resolution of again returning to England. He however left his son behind him at a school, in or near Paris.[1]

Before Mr. Holcroft went from England, he had left an opera, called the Noble Peasant,[2] in the hands of Mr. Colman, then manager of the Hay-market theatre. This had been accepted; and such was Mr. Colman's opinion of it, that

distressed for money to carry on his own extensive business of printing. John Rivington was a good-natured, worthy man, much esteemed by his friends. He died before the middle period of life, of a typhous fever, some time about the year 1785, or 1786.—Hazlitt. See note 1, p. 255.

[1] For purely personal details relating to this first visit to Paris and not affecting his professional labours, see Holcroft's later book, *Travels from Hamburg to Paris* (1804), 1 : 159, 167, 175, 316 ; 2 : 233.

[2] Music composed and adapted by Shield. A contemporary memorandum slip which I have indicates that Mr. Cadell (bookseller) sent a copy of this to the novelist, Mrs. Frances Brooke, 25 August, 1784. As testimony of Holcroft's reputation at this time, there can be cited "A new catalogue of the Glasgow Circulating Library" which includes *Alwyn*, *The Noble Peasant*, *Follies of a Day*, *The Memoirs of Baron de Tott*, *The Choleric Fathers*, and *Memoirs of Voltaire* (Mitchell Library, Glasgow,—G 119,795).

on his return, he advanced Mr. Holcroft a hundred pounds, in the expectation of its future success. This piece was acted the ensuing season (in 1784). The evening it was acted, Mr. Holcroft had placed himself behind the scenes, as authors generally do, to watch the progress of the piece, or be of occasional assistance. At the end however, of the first act, the effect produced on the audience seemed so discouraging, and disapprobation began to manifest itself so strongly, that Mr. Holcroft could not longer stand it. He left the theatre, quite hopeless of success, and went and walked for an hour in St. James's Park. He had by this time so far mastered the agitation of his spirits, that he returned to the Haymarket, tolerably resigned to his fate. He got in just at the conclusion of the third act, and was most agreeably surprised, when he heard the house resounding with applause, and saw himself surrounded by the actors and others, who came to congratulate him on the complete success of the piece.—It however only ran eleven nights. It was then stopped by Mr. Colman, in consequence of a disagreement with the author, whom he had without reason suspected of writing some paragraphs in the Morning Herald against The Connoisseurs.[1] Mr. Holcroft soon

[1] I believe it is in The Connoisseurs that a yawning scene was introduced by the author, who being also the manager, found great difficulty in getting it acted to his mind. He was met one morning by Macklin, coming out from a rehearsal, and looking rather discontented. The other asked what was the matter. "I can't get

after vindicated himself so fully from this charge, that Mr. Colman was satisfied.

The success of this opera was not certainly equal to its merits, which are considerable. It seems to have given rise to a succession of plays of the same kind, the scene of which is laid in the ages of chivalry, and which represent the costume, characters, and manners of remote times. Such particularly have been the Battle of Hexham, The Mountaineers, The Venetian Outlaw, &c. This opera is in fact a romance dramatised.—A young peasant joins some outlaws who are no other than the famous archers, Adam Bell, Clym of the Clough, and Will Cloudesley; and soon after, has an opportunity together with them, to defeat a band of Danes, who were proceeding to attack the castle of Earl Walter, which lies in the neighbourhood of Sherwood. The cause of this quarrel is, that Anlaff the Dane had demanded Edwitha, a daughter of Earl Walter, in marriage, and had

these fellows to yawn," was the answer. "Oh, if that's all," said Macklin, "you have only to read them the first act of The Man of Business": a dull play of that name, by Colman.—Hazlitt. Possibly a confusion for some other play of Colman's. "The Connoisseurs" was a journal of the "Spectator" type, conducted by C. Colman and Bonnell Thornton, Jan. 31, 1754, to Sept. 30, 1756.—W.-G. Lloyd, Churchill, and Cowper also contributed (Aldine edition of Churchill, 1 : 116). Later Holcroft said, in *The Theatrical Recorder* (May, 1805), "Among the candidates for dramatic fame, Mr. Colman . . . holds a very distinguished rank."

been refused. On this he determines to enforce his claim, and in the battle which ensues, Earl Walter's men under his son Harold are nearly vanquished, when they are unexpectedly joined by the outlaws and Leonard, the noble peasant, who slays Alric, the brother of the Danish chief. This youth who in addition to his warlike achievements, is represented with all the grace and amiableness of an Arcadian swain, is the first who by chance communicates the news of the victory to Edwitha, and her cousin Adela, who had wandered to a little distance from the castle. Edwitha is immediately smitten with the manly appearance, and modest demeanour of Leonard, the peasant, and is rallied a good deal on the subject, by her witty and merciless cousin, who puts the reader somewhat in mind of the character of Beatrice. Adam Bell, and his renowned compeers, in consequence of their service in the battle, conceive a plan for being reconciled to Earl Walter; and for this purpose, Adam Bell goes to the castle in the disguise of a Friar, to watch for some favourable opportunity of obtaining a pardon. Harold and his followers return, and one of these, Earl Egbert, a ridiculous, cowardly braggard, pretends to have slain Anlaff, whose sword and armour he has carried in a pompous manner before him by his Dwarf. This story is contradicted by the pretended friar, who says that he had shrieved a young peasant an hour before, who confessed that he had slain the Danish warrior. However, on the strength of the boasted service he had done, Earl Egbert lays

claim to Earl Walter's daughter; and his pretensions are admitted by the father, in opposition to the most earnest remonstrances of the young lady. The valiant Earl accordingly remains at the castle, to court his froward mistress, while Harold, with his chosen friends, sets out to hunt for a few days on Cheviot Hills. The Danes hearing of his absence, and in revenge for the death of Alric, once more attack the castle, through which the greatest terror prevails, and particularly in the breast of Egbert; when Adam Bell takes the opportunity to discover himself to Earl Walter, and on obtaining promises of pardon, winds his bugle-horn, and is immediately joined by his friends who had watched without the castle, and among the rest by Leonard. A challenge is now sent from Anlaff, to the conqueror of his brother, to meet him in single combat, on the conditions, that if defeated, his followers are immediately to withdraw from the castle, but that if victorious, he is to bear off Edwitha as his prize. This message startles Earl Egbert, and he is going to disclaim his share in the death of Alric; when Leonard persuades him to accept the challenge, by offering to exchange armour privately with him, and meet the haughty Dane in his stead. They fight, and victory declares in favour of Leonard. Just before the battle, a letter conveyed by an arrow, had fallen at the feet of Edwitha, conjuring her to pray for the success of Leonard the peasant, which had occasioned some surprise. The riddle is now explained, and Leonard, the

conqueror of Anlaff and Alric, and the preserver of her house, lays claim to the hand of Edwitha, as his reward. To this there are insuperable obstacles in the meanness of his origin; but this difficulty is soon removed by a discovery, that though disguised as a peasant, he is the son of a noble warrior. Harold returns, the marriage is celebrated, the outlaws are pardoned, and nothing but happiness reigns through the castle of Earl Walter.

The story of this little piece is interesting, and natural, as far as a romantic story can be so. The dialogue is well supported throughout, particularly in the comic parts; and though there are frequent imitations of Shakespeare, both in the incidents, characters, and speeches, yet they are very happily executed, with much wit and fancy; which shew that the author had imbibed the spirit of the poet, in whose steps he treads. The songs, both the serious and humorous ones, have great merit; and were most of them set by Shield, to whom Mr. Holcroft, in his preface to the opera, pays a very high and deserved compliment. I should add here, for the sake of those who take an interest in dramatic retrospections, that Parsons played Earl Egbert, and that the part of the Fool was performed by Edwin.

Mr. Holcroft's next piece came out at Covent Garden, and was called The Choleric Fathers.[1]

[1] "Tolerably received," Oulton. Played seven times to diminishing receipts, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18, and 24 November, 1785. December 23, Holcroft was paid 140*l.* 13*s.*, "his Ballc on 2 Nts" (British Museum, *Egerton MSS.* 2286, fol. 27–53).

This opera is inferior to the last. The scene is supposed to be in Spain, and the business of the play turns upon the testy disposition of two fathers, who suddenly break off a match between their children, just as they are going to sign the marriage-settlement. The merit of the piece consists chiefly in the easy impudence and vivacity of a valet, who forms a number of schemes, and acts different characters, to outwit the old gentlemen, and bring about a reconciliation. The plot is formed after the manner of the Spanish school, full of intrigue and difficulties: these are at last overcome with a good deal of ingenuity; and the denouement is both natural and unexpected.

Mr. Holcroft had for some time been concerned in the Wit's Magazine, for which he wrote a number of amusing articles: but he now declined his share in it, seeming determined to bend his mind wholly to works of greater moment.[1]

[1] He edited it. See my Bibliography.

CHAPTER IV

IN 1784, the Marriage of Figaro (*Mariage de Figaro*), by Beaumarchais, came out at Paris, where it was acted with astonishing success. Mr. Holcroft no sooner received notice of this piece, than he formed the instant resolution of going over to France to procure a copy of it, in order to translate and adapt it to the English stage.

He arrived in Paris the latter end of September, 1784, and proceeded to the lodgings of his friend Bonneville, to whom he immediately communicated the object of his journey. They both set about the accomplishment of it directly, but they found it attended with greater difficulty than they had expected. The comedy had not been printed: therefore their first plan was to procure a manuscript copy, either at the theatre, or through some friend of the author. This attempt however they found fruitless, from the jealousy with which the managers of the French theatre prevented any copies from getting abroad. The only resource now remaining was to commit it to memory. And for this purpose, both Holcroft and his friend went to the theatre every night for a week or ten days successively, till they brought away the whole with perfect

exactness. At night when they got home, each of them set down as much as he could recollect of a scene, and they then compared notes; if any difficulty occurred, it was determined the following evening. Another scene was brought away from the next representation in like manner, and the entire play was at length transcribed. It was necessary to proceed in this deliberate and cautious manner as if they had attempted to take notes, or had continued to do so more than once, their design would probably have been suspected, and defeated by the interference of the police.

Mr. Holcroft was not, it seems, quite confident of his success, till he had his manuscript safely deposited in his portmanteau, with which he immediately set out on his return home. No time was lost, and the acquisition Mr. Holcroft had made was the day after his arrival communicated to Mr. Harris, through the Robinsons. A meeting was appointed, and it was agreed that Figaro should, with all possible expedition, make his appearance in an English dress. The necessary metamorphosis was completed in a few weeks, and Figaro was acted at Covent Garden Theatre, under the title of the Follies of a Day, a little before the Christmas holidays. The reception of the new piece was equal to the sanguine expectations Mr. Holcroft had formed, and the pains he had taken to bring it forward. It continued to be acted without intermission for a considerable length of time, and is still one of our most popular entertainments. It is needless

here to give any account, or to speak of the merits of a piece so well known to the public, and for which we are indebted more to Mr. Holcroft's industry and enterprise, than to his genius as an author. It would be unjust, however, to suppose, that it is a mere literal translation. Many alterations were necessary to adapt it exactly to the taste of an English audience, and these were executed with much skill and felicity. Of all the pieces brought out by the author, this and the Road to Ruin have been the most successful. He received six hundred pounds for it at the theatre, besides a considerable sum for the copy-right, which was bought in at the time.[1] Mr. Holcroft himself played the part of Figaro, *and also spoke the prologue telling how the play was pilfered*,[2] the first *three* nights,[3] in the absence

[1] The text shows in several places its origin in the remembrance of spoken lines, and is a free adaptation rather than a translation. See Lomenie, *Beaumarchais and His Times*, 4: 9–14; and *La Folle Journée*, ed. F. de Morescot, Paris, 1870, vol. 3, p. lxxvii. For receipts see "Financial Accounts" in *Notes and Queries*, 146: 60–63.

[2] "Neither borrow'd, begg'd, nor bought."

[3] The italicized words are corrections, in accordance with facts determined by the present editor. Holcroft himself had once been compelled to fill in a vacant part in *Duplicity* (1781), and Mrs. Inchbald sustained a character in her own farce, *The Mogul Tale* (1784) (Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 1: 186 et seq.). Following the August, 1789, race week Miss Farren acted the part of Susan at York (Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, 3: 87).

John Genest April 30th 1787

THE FOLLIES OF A DAY;

OR, THE

MARRIAGE OF FIGARO.

A COMEDY,

AS IT IS NOW PERFORMING AT THE

THEATRE-ROYAL,

COVENT-GARDEN.

FROM THE

FRENCH OF M. DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

By THOMAS HOLCROFT.

AUTHOR OF DUPLICITY, A COMEDY, THE NOBLE PEASANT, AN OPERA, &c.

LONDON:

Printed for G. G. J. and J. ROBINSON,
PATER-NOSTER ROW.

M DCC LXXXV.

of Mr. Bonner,[1] for whom it was designed and who afterwards took it. Mr. Holcroft had before this given up his engagement at Drury Lane, but at what precise period I cannot tell.[2]

[" This play was written by a man who drank light French wines : in every line you see the brisk champaign frothing through green glasses. The beads rise sparkling to the surface and then evaporate. There is nothing in it to remember and absolutely nothing to criticise ; but it is the triumph of animal spirits : while you see it you seem to drink ether, or to inhale an atmosphere not bred of fog or sea-coal fires. This is the secret of the charm of Figaro." [3]]

The music of the only song in this piece, " Ah ! well-a-day, my poor heart," was by Shield. It became a great favourite ; and Longman, coming to treat for the purchase of the music with Shield, who hesitated what price to ask, the other, half laughing, made him an offer of three and twenty dozen of wine for it ; which terms were readily acceded to by Shield, it being more than he had at that time ever received for a song. Mr. Holcroft took the first opportunity of acquainting his friend Bonneville with the success of the undertaking in which

[1] " Charles Bonner . . . was a sprightly actor, with a very bright and sparkling expression of face and a neat, well-compacted person of middle age " (Boaden, *Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble*, chap. ix).

[2] See above regarding *Duplicity*, p. 243.

[3] Hazlitt, *Collected Works*, Waller-Glover ed., 1902 (8 : 355).

he had been of such service to him. His letter is dated December 28, 1784.

"Dear Bonneville, I am sure you will pardon my apparent neglect, when you remember how exceedingly hard I have been obliged to labour since my arrival in England. Figaro has made his appearance, and is likely to be as great a favourite in London as in Paris. I wish most sincerely you were here to be a witness of his good fortune. I enclose a letter of exchange for 480 livres, on Girard and Co., bankers, Paris. The many obligations I have to your friendship, the pleasure I take in your company, and the fears I entertain lest your very virtues should lead you into irretrievable difficulties, make me earnestly desire to see you in England. Fortune seems at present disposed to smile upon my efforts; I only wish you were with me to participate her favours. I am sure you would be happy. Why will you not come? Billy has written to you, as you will see; you know he loves you, he has reason to do so; and though a child, I hope he will not forget his obligation.[1] Pray do not fail to tell M. and Madame Mercier, that though I do not write, I remember them as they would wish to be remembered, that is, I remember their virtue and their friendship, and shall do while I live."

Mr. Holcroft had about this time considerable intimacy with several French literary characters;

[1] Mr. Holcroft, as it appears from this letter, had brought his son William with him from France.—Hazlitt

among others, with M. Berquin,[1] the author of "The Children's Friend," who came over here to inspect the translation of his own work into English; and a Mr. Floscel, an unfortunate but worthy man, whose works he recommended to the public in a circular proposal. Mr. Floscel came over to England to procure some subscriptions to a considerable literary undertaking, but was attacked by a disorder which proved fatal to him soon after his arrival.

It may be proper to add here, that Mr. Holcroft had offered the Marriage of Figaro to Drury Lane theatre, before he left England; but he had clogged this proposal with other conditions, which probably prevented its acceptance. This appears from a letter either to Mr. Sheridan or Mr. Linley, which may be worth insertion; both as it contains the first hints of a project of dramatic authorship, which has, I believe, been since acted upon at the other house, and as it is characteristic of Mr. Holcroft's unwearied industry in his different undertakings, and of the sanguine temper with which he encouraged the most distant prospects of success. It is necessary to observe in explanation of one part of the letter, that he had while in Paris (in 1783), written

[1] Arnauld Berquin (1749–1791), a writer for children. —W.-G. His writings and those of Madame de Genlis opened up the field of juvenile literature into which Godwin stepped as a publisher and Lamb as a writer. Cf. in *The Bibliographer*, edited by Paul Leicester Ford, an article, "Some Notes on Three of Lamb's Juveniles," by Luther S. Livingston, 1: 215–230, June, 1902.

a tragedy, the heroine of which he very anxiously wished to see personated by Mrs. Siddons, who was now in the height of her reputation.

"SIR,

"Not having been able to see you on the subject of the tragedy (Ellen, or the Fatal Cave) and being at present obliged to make a journey to Paris, I take the liberty of submitting the following proposals to your consideration. Besides the tragedy already presented, I have a comedy begun, which will be ready in a month after my return; that is, I will engage to give it in complete, some time in November.

"My proposals then, Sir, are, instead of author's nights, to receive a salary, and that a very moderate one; for which, exclusive of the tragedy and comedy already mentioned, I will engage to write any recitatives, songs, or choruses, which may be wanted for pantomimes, or other temporary occasions in the theatre. The terms I require are ten pounds per week, under the following provisos. If either the tragedy or comedy are condemned by the public, I will furnish an after-piece; should two out of the three miscarry, my salary shall be reduced to seven pounds per week; and should all three be unfortunate, to five; and to be in the receipt of only five pounds per week till one has succeeded, the arrears to be then paid. By this proposal Mrs. Siddons's nights will not be encroached upon. I, as an author, shall have the interest of the house at heart, and shall neglect no oppor-

tunity of promoting that interest:—the terms are so moderate, the probabilities I presume are greatly that the proprietors should gain, not lose. My own reputation will make me exert myself to the utmost; and with respect to my fulfilling the conditions proposed, I will enter into any forfeiture, not exceeding the receipt of my whole salary, to fulfil them literally. Indeed, whatever my talents may be, my industry and facility will not be disputed. I set off for France to-morrow morning, where, Sir, there is at present a most popular piece, 'The Marriage of Figaro,' which I shall endeavour to procure; it will be to the advantage of the theatre to get first what I know is thought an object, and which, if these terms are agreeable to you, Sir, and the proprietors, I shall then be more earnest and expeditious, concerning. I must, however, add, I am by no means certain of obtaining it; on the contrary, I understand it will be attended with great difficulties. I must intreat, Sir, that this proposal remain totally a secret, if not acceded to; otherwise it might injure me: and the fear lest it might by accident become known, was the only motive that prevented me from making it sooner. Should this meet your approbation, you will greatly oblige me to signify as much as soon as possible, by sending a line directed to me at Paris."

CHAPTER V

THE Comedy of Seduction appeared in the year 1787, and was received with very great applause.[1] Some few hints for this play were taken from *Les Liaisons Dangereux ;* but it was chiefly original, and possessed great merit. In 1789, appeared the translation of the King of Prussia's works, in twelve or thirteen volumes, and also the translation of the Essays of Lavater. For the former of these, Mr. Holcroft received 1200*l.* from Robinsons, the booksellers. He had worked almost night and day to get it out soon, and to prevent the possibility of anticipation. He had, I believe, very early, and before the publication of the original work, procured a copy, through the interest of the Prussian Ambassador. He complains, in one of his letters about this time, of the difficulty he had in translating the poetry of the great Frederic, for whom our author, though he translated his works, seems to have had no great predilection. Mr. Holcroft long

[1] Played at Drury Lane, March 12, 13, 17, 19, 22, 24, April 12, May 1, 5. The author received for his three nights something over 250*l.* (British Museum, *Add. MSS.*, 29,709, fol. 396 b, ff.).

projected a work, of which Frederick II was to have been the hero, and the subject the effects of war and despotism. He made considerable preparations for this work; for he had completely lined a large closet with books, which were to furnish the materials, direct or collateral, for writing his history of *bad* governements.[1] His translation of Lavater's smaller work has certainly been the means of making the English public acquainted with the system of that ingenious and lively writer; but it was criticised with unusual severity by the authors of the Analytical Review, and this led to some disagreeable altercation between Mr. Holcroft and the Reviewers.

In 1790, the German Hotel appeared at Covent Garden, a play which is little more than a translation from the German of Brandes.[2] The plot is very neat and lively, and sometimes interesting: but there is very little besides plot and incident in the piece. Baron Thorck seems the counter-

[1] This sentence and the one preceding it originally appeared as a footnote.

[2] Played November 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 25, 29, December 1, 14, 1790, and January 4, 1791, at Covent Garden (British Museum, *Egerton MSS.* 2291, fol. 26–56). The Preface says: "For himself, the English author makes but few claims. His production in most of its parts is nothing more than a literal translation; but there are others in which it is something exceedingly different. The various touches which, in consequence of difference of manners, or of taste in the writers, could not but occur, it would be vain to enumerate."

part of Squire Thornhill, in the Vicar of Wakefield. The most striking circumstance in this drama is the perfect preservation of the unities of time and place. In the present instance, this peculiarity adds to the natural effect of the scene by riveting the imagination to one spot, and thus giving a sort of reality to it, and by making the incidents follow one another in such quick succession, that the mind has no time to question their probability. The events are some of them the most improbable that can be supposed; yet such is the mechanical construction of the plot, that they seem inseparably interwoven with each other, and as if they could not happen otherwise. The whole play is like a scene really passing in a hall of a large Hotel, in the course of a few hours.

Mr. Holcroft brought out the Comedy of The School for Arrogance, in the beginning of 1791. In consequence of some disagreement between Mr. Holcroft and Mr. Harris respecting former pieces, it was imagined it would not be very graciously received if the author were known; and a friend undertook for a time *to father* the piece.[1] After the comedy had been twice performed, the author wrote the following letter to the manager of the theatre. It is published in the preface.

[1] For details as to success of piece, see "Financial Accounts of Holcroft Plays," in *Notes and Queries*, 146: 42. Mary Wollstonecraft's review of this piece appeared in *The Analytical Review* for March, 1791 (9: 340).

"SIR,

"I have patiently waited the proper moment in which to write to you. That moment I hope is now come. I should be guilty of injustice, were I any longer to delay expressing my sense of the propriety with which you have acted relative to the School for Arrogance, after you had every reason to suppose it mine. Such conduct, Sir, is highly honourable; and is not only productive of the best effects, but must secure the best and most permanent applause. That you had conceived disadvantageous ideas of me, I knew; though I have no doubt, but I shall ultimately convince you, that, even supposing me to be mistaken, my motives have been laudable. With me you were irritated; but you had the justice to forget the man, and promote the interests of the piece. This I hold it my duty to say to the world at large.

"I am, Sir, &c."

The School for Arrogance is, in its plan, founded on *Le Glorieux* of Destouches, but it is for the most part original. It is Mr. Holcroft's best play, with the exception of the Road to Ruin, and, perhaps, even this exception is doubtful. The last of these pieces is, no doubt, much more adapted for stage-effect; but I question whether the former would not be perused oftener, and with greater delight, in the closet. It is less eventful, less interesting, less showy and dazzling; but it has beauties more refined in the conception, and difficult in the execution. Such

is the whole of the character of Count Conolly Villars, which is managed throughout with the nicest art. His pride of birth; the conflict between the feelings of love, and a sense of the honour of his family; and the rapid and delicate alternations of passion, arising from a constant fear of degrading himself, either by resisting, or indulging the familiarity of others, are described without the violation of truth, perhaps, in a single instance. On the other hand, the contrast between the pride of wealth and that of ancestry, which the character of Lady Peckham gives the author an opportunity to display, has an effect equally forcible, whether we regard the immediate impression on the audience, or the moral lesson it conveys. The other characters are comparatively insignificant, though necessary and well supported. To expose the weaknesses of pride, as it is founded on the prejudice either of wealth or ancestry, may be said to form the whole business of the piece. This, however, is not done by pompous, laboured declamation, or satirical epigrams; but by shewing the effects of these prejudices on real characters, and in natural situations. As this play is less known than some of Mr. Holcroft's other plays, we shall select the following scene for the entertainment of the reader.

"*Enter* Count, *bowing.*

Lady Peckham. So, Sir! They tells me, Sir, that you and my foolish husband are colloguing together, for to marry my daughter! Is this troo, Sir?

Count (*with his usual polite haughtiness*). If it were, Ma'am?

Lady P. Do you know who Miss Loocy Peckham is, Sir?

Count. Not very well, Ma'am.

Lady P. Sir?

Count. Except that she is your daughter.

Lady P. And do you know who I am, Sir?

Count. I have been told, Ma'am.

Lady P. Told, Sir! Told! What have you been told? What have you been told, Sir?

Count. That your ladyship was an honest wax-chandler's daughter.

Lady P. Yes, Sir! The debbidy of his vard, Sir! A common council-man, and city sword-bearer! Had an Aldermand's gownd von year, vus chosen sheriff the next, and died a lord-mayor elect!

Count. With all his honours blooming on his brow!

Lady P. And do you know, Sir, that I designs, Sir, Samoocl Sheepy, Sir, an English knight and barrow knight, for the spouse of my daughter! A gentleman, that is a gentleman! A person of honour and purtensions, and not a Papish Jesubite!

Count. Of his honours and pretensions I have yet to be informed, Madam.

Lady P. What, Sir! do you mean for to say, Sir, or to insinivate, Sir, that Sir Samoocl Sheepy is not your betters?

Count. If Sir Samuel himself, Madam, had

put such a question to me, I would have replied with my sword, or more properly, with my cane.

Lady P. Wery vell, Sir! I'll let Sir Samooel know that you threatens to cane him; I'll take care to report you! Cane quotha! He shall talk to you.

Count. Let him, Madam.

Lady P. Madam! Madam! At every word—Pray, Sir, do you know that Sir Paul Peckham has had the honour to be knighted by the king's own hand?

Count. I have heard as much, Madam.

Lady P. Madam, indeed!—And for you to think for to look up to my daughter!

Count. Up, Madam!

Lady P. Yes, Sir—up, Sir!—Pray, Sir, what are your purtensions?

Count (*with great agitation*). Madam!

Lady P. Who are you, Sir? Vhere do you come from? Who knows you? Vhat parish do you belong to?

Count. Madam, I am of a family known to history, known to Europe, known to the whole universe!

Lady P. Ah! I believes you are better known than trusted.

Count. The names of Conolly and Villars, Madam, never before were so degraded as they have been in my person.

Lady P. Oh! I makes no doubt but you are a person that vould degurade any name!

Count. Insult like that I have received from

you, Madam, no *man* should utter and escape death—But you are—

Lady P. What, Sir? What am I, Sir?

Count. A woman.

Lady P. A voman, indeed! Sir, I vould have you to know as how I am a lady! A lady, Sir, of his Majesty's own making! And moreover, Sir, don't you go for to flatter yourself that I shall bestow the hand and fortin of Miss Loocy Peckham upon any needy outlandish Count somebody nobody! My daughter, Sir, is for your betters!

Count. Madam, though scurril—[*Recollecting himself*] I say, Madam, though such vul—, such accusations are beneath all answer, yet I must tell you that by marrying your daughter, if after this I should sink myself so low—I say, by marrying your daughter, Madam, I should confer an honour on your family, as much superior to its expectations, as the splendour of the glorious sun is to the twinkling of the worthless glow-worm!

Lady P. What! What! [*Enter Edmund, son of Lady Peckham.*] Marry come up! An Irish French foriner! Not so good as von of our parish *porpers!* And you! You purtend to compare yourself to the united houses of the Peckhams and the Pringles! Your family indeed! Yourn! Vhere's your settlement? Yourn! Vus'nt my great uncle, Mr. Peter Pringle, the cheese-monger of Cateaton-street, a major in the Train Bands before you vus born, or thought of?

Edmund [*Aside.*] So, so! I'm too late! [*Aloud.*] Let me intreat your ladyship——

Lady P. Vhat! Hasn't I an ownd sister at this day married to Mr. Poladore Spraggs, the tip-toppest hot-presser in all Crutched Friars! Isn't my maiden aunt, Miss Angelica Pringle, vorth thirty thousand pounds, in the South Sea funds, every morning she rises! And doesn't I myself get up and go to bed the greatest lady in this here city! And for to purtend for to talk to me of his family! His'n.

Edmund. The Count, Madam, is a man of the first distinction in his native country.

Lady P. Vhat country is that, Sir? Who ever heard of any country but England? A Count among beggars! How much is his Countship worth?

Count. I had determined to be silent, Madam, but I find it impossible! [*With vehement volubility.*] And I must inform you, my family is as ancient, as exalted, and as renowned, as you have proved yours to be—what I shall not repeat! That I am the heir to more rich acres than I believe your Ladyship ever rode over! That my father's vassals are more numerous than your Ladyship's vaunted guineas! That the magnificence in which he has lived, looked with contempt on the petty, paltry strainings of a trader's pride! And that in his hall are daily fed—[*Stops short, and betrays a consciousness of inadvertent falsehood, but suddenly continues with increasing vehemence.*] Yes, Madam, are daily fed; now, at this moment, Madam, more faithful

adherents, with their menials and followers, than all your boasted wealth could for a single year supply!

Edmund. Are? At this moment, say you, Count?

Count. Sir, I—I have said.

Edmund. I know you to be a man of honour, and that you cannot say what is not.

Count. I—I—I—have said, Sir! [*Walking with great perturbation.*]

Lady P. You have said more in a minute than you can prove in a year!

Edmund. I will pledge my word for the Count's veracity.

Count [*Aside.*] What have I done! [*With agony.*] A lie!

Lady P. As for you, Sir, I doesn't believe von vord you say! I knows the tricks of such sham chevaliers as you, too vell!

Count [*Walking away from her.*] Torture!

Lady P. But I'll take care to have you prognosticated.

Count [*Aside.*] I can support it no longer. [*Going.*]

Edmund [*Catching him by the hand.*] My dear Count——

Count. Sir, I am a dishonoured villain! [*Exit.*

Lady P. There! There! he tells you himself he is a willin? his conscience flies in his face, and he owns it!

Edmund [*With great ardour and feeling.*] Madam, he is a noble-hearted gentleman! His

agonizing mind deems it villainy to suffer insult so gross. [*Exit.*

Re-enter the COUNT, *deep in thought, and much agitated.*

Lady P. [*Seeing him.*] Marry my daughter, indeed!—Faugh!

[*Exit Lady Peckham.*

Count. Into wat has my impetuous anger hurried me?—Guilty of falsehood! I? To recede is impossible! What! Stand detected before this city Madam!—whose tongue, itching with the very scrophula of pride, would iterate liar in my ear! No! Falsehood itself is not so foul."—ACT III.

This is truth and nature. If it should be thought that the description of Lady Peckham borders too much on caricature, it should be remembered that grossness is the essence of the character, and it serves to set off more forcibly the refinement of the Count. If, however, it should be insisted that the scene which has been transcribed is a union of farce and sentimental comedy, still it is farce worthy of Foote, and the serious part is worthy of any one.

The sentiments which are inculcated in the scene which precedes the one just quoted, are such as have never been embodied with the prejudices of any class of men, because it must be confessed they are much more adapted to convince the reason than to flatter the passions or the imagination! Lucy Peckham is a female philosopher, and lectures the Count on his

pretensions, in a manner scarcely less grating to his feelings, than the personalities of her mother. The Count says, "Mankind have agreed, Madam, to honour the descendants of the wise and the brave." To this his mistress replies, "They have so,—But you have, doubtless, too much native merit to arrogate to yourself the worth of others! You are no jay, decked in the peacock's feathers! You are not idiot enough to imagine that a skin of parchment, on which are emblazoned the arms and the acts of one wise man, with a long list of succeeding fools, is any honour to you! Responsible to mankind for the use and the abuse of such talents as you feel yourself endowed with, you ought to think only how you may deserve greatly; and disdain to be that secondary thing, that insignificant cypher, which is worthless, except from situation!"

Whatever may be thought of the political tendency of this speech, the morality of it is unquestionable; and though it may not be practicable for society at large to act upon the standard here proposed, yet surely every individual would do well to apply it to his own conduct, and to the value which he sets upon himself in his own private esteem. However necessary it may be that the vulgar should respect rank for its own sake, it is desirable that the great themselves should respect virtue more, and endeavour to make the theory, on which nobility is founded, correspond with the practice—private worth with public esteem. The sentiments of this kind, which Mr. Holcroft has

interspersed through his different works, may therefore remain as useful moral lessons: their noxious political qualities, if ever they had such, have long since evaporated; though I shall take an opportunity to shew that Mr. Holcroft's politics were never any thing more than an enlarged system of morality, growing out of just sentiments, and general improvement.

The School for Arrogance is the first of the author's pieces, in which there appeared a marked tendency to political or philosophical speculation. Sentiments of this kind, however, and at that time, would rather have increased than diminished the popularity of any piece. A proof of this is, that the very epilogue (which is seldom designed to give offence), glances that way.

> "Such is the modern man of high-flown fashion!
> Such are the scions sprung from Runny-Mead!
> The richest soil, that bears the rankest weed!
> Potatoe-like, the sprouts are worthless found;
> And all that's good of them *is under ground*."

The wit and point of this satire, will not be disputed.

Mr. Holcroft's next play was The Road to Ruin, which carried his fame as a dramatic writer into every corner of the kingdom, where there was a play-house. Nothing could exceed the effect produced by this play at its first appearance, nor its subsequent popularity. It not only became a universal favourite, but it deserved to be so. Mr. Holcroft, in sending round one or

two copies of it to his friends before it was acted, had spoken of it as his best performance. He had hitherto been generally dissatisfied with what he had written, as not answering his own wishes, or what he thought himself capable of producing: but in this instance he seems to have thought his muse had been as favourable to him as she was likely to be. Authors are perhaps seldom deceived with respect to their works, when they judge of them from their own immediate feelings, and not out of contradiction to the opinions of others, or from a desire to excel in something which the world thinks them incapable of. Mr. Holcroft's predictions were at least verified by the appearance of the Road to Ruin. It had a run greater than almost any other piece was ever known to have, and there is scarcely a theatre in the kingdom, except Drury-Lane, and the Haymarket, in which it has not been acted numberless times. The profits he received from it were nine hundred pounds from Mr. Harris, and three or four hundred for the copy-right.[1]

The Road to Ruin is so well known to the public, and its merits have been so fully established, that it seems almost impertinent to make any remarks upon it: yet as it is Mr. Holcroft's greatest dramatic effort, it might be thought wrong to pass it over, without attempting to

[1] See "Financial Accounts of Holcroft Plays" in *Notes and Queries*, 146: 60. Mary Wollstonecraft's review of this appeared in *The Analytical Review* for July, 1792 (13: 294).

point out its leading features, or ascertain its rank among similar productions.

The character of Goldfinch, though not the principal character, was undoubtedly that which contributed most to the popularity of the piece. Nine persons out of ten who went to see the Road to Ruin, went for the sake of seeing Goldfinch; though the best parts of the play are those in which he has no concern. The very great effect it produced was, in some measure, owing to the inimitable acting of Lewis.[1] But there are other circumstances which would almost be sure to make it the favourite of the public. In the first place, it is a most masterly delineation of the character it pretends to describe; namely, that of a person of very little understanding, but with very great animal spirits, in the heigh-day of youth and thoughtlessness, and who is hurried away by all the vulgar dissipation of fashionable life. There is not the smallest glimmering of wit or sense in all that Goldfinch says; yet nothing can exceed the life, the spirit, the extreme volubility, the restless animation, which Mr. Holcroft has thrown into this character. He has none but the most mean and grovelling ideas; his language consists of a few cant words; yet the rapidity

[1] Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee* (1: 165; 4: 24), speaks of the ill-fortune of Covent Garden in 1791 until *The Road to Ruin* gained its supremacy, when Lewis's Goldfinch "was hailed with shouts of triumph from box, pit, and galleries."

Charles Mathews
as "Goldfinch" in "The Road to Ruin"
published in Oxberry's New English Drama, Vol 7, 1819

with which he glances from object to object, and the evident delight which he takes in introducing his favourite phrases on all occasions, have all the effect of the most brilliant wit. *That's your sort* comes in at least fifty times, and is just as unexpected and lively the last time as the first, for no other reason than because Goldfinch has just the same pleasure in repeating it. This mechanical humour was so much the more striking in its effect, because every person could make it his own. It was a very transferable, and therefore a very convenient, commodity. It was a compendious receipt for being witty, to go and see Goldfinch, and repeat after him, *That's your sort.* If the invention was not favourable to the increase, it was at least calculated for the spread of wit. Mr. Holcroft may in some sort be considered as the author of this species of dramatic humour, of which succeeding writers have fully availed themselves, and on which the effect of many of our most popular modern pieces depends. Cant terms have, it is true, always been the subject of ridicule on the stage; but Mr. Holcroft was, I believe, the first who made them interesting; or who conceived the project of giving spirit and animation to a character by the force of a single phrase. The two most important characters in the piece, are those of old Dornton and his son; the former, an eminent banker in the city, the latter, a wild, but high-minded and noble spirited young man, something like Charles, in The School for Scandal. The serious interest of the piece arises

chiefly from the struggle between prudence and affection in the mind of the father, and from the compunction and generous sacrifices of the youth to save his father's house from the ruin which he believes he has brought upon it. He is in love with Sophia, the daughter of the widow Warren. This last lady is described with a person and mind equally unprepossessing. She is, however, supposed to be rich, and is violently in love with young Dornton, who determines, rather than see his father ruined, to marry her and forsake his young and guileless Sophia. This match is prevented by the timely interference of old Dornton.

Mr. Sulky and Mr. Silky are two very principal characters in the play, whose names are happily adapted to their characters; the one being as remarkable for a blunt kind of surly honesty, as the other is for smooth, sleek, fawning knavery. It is, however, on the confusion of these two names, that the contrivance of the plot depends. For the late Mr. Warren, not being well pleased with the conduct of his wife, and suspecting her violent professions of a determination not to marry again, had made a will, in which, in case an event should happen, he had left his property to his natural son, Milford, and to his wife's daughter, appointing Mr. Sulky his executor. He died abroad; and the person who brought over the will, being deceived by the name, leaves it in the possession of Mr. Silky, instead of Mr. Sulky. Mr. Silky, knowing the widow's amorous propensities, and willing to profit by them,

informs Goldfinch, who is besieging her for her money, that he has a deed in his possession which puts the widow's fortune, should she marry again, entirely in his power; and exacts a promise from him of fifty thousand pounds out of a hundred and fifty, as the price of secrecy, with respect to himself. He then calls on the widow, shews her the conditions of the will, and threatens to make it public unless she marries Goldfinch, and assents to his proposal. She, however, governed by her passion for young Dornton, and relying on the exhaustless wealth of his family, sets Mr. Silky and his secret at defiance; and on his next visit, treats Mr. Goldfinch with very little ceremony. But after she finds herself disappointed of Dornton, and is in the height of her exclamations against the whole sex, Goldfinch is announced. His name at this moment has the effect of suddenly calming her spirits; he is admitted; received with much affected modesty: he makes another offer; the bargain is struck; Mr. Silky is sent for, and Goldfinch sets off post haste for a license. But just as he is going out, he meets Milford; and being more fool than knave, he tells the latter of his marriage, and of the hush-money to Silky, on account of some deed, by which he has the widow's fortune at his command, though he does not know how. This excites suspicion in the mind of Milford, who, supposing it must be his father's will, goes immediately to Sulky to inform him of the circumstances, and they conceal themselves in the widow's apartment.

Goldfinch, Silky, and the widow, soon after come in; every thing is settled; and the will is on the point of being committed to the flames, when Milford and Sulky burst upon them, and their whole scheme is unluckily defeated.

This sketch may be sufficient to give an idea of the bustle of the scene, and the rapidity with which events follow one another. The story never stagnates for a moment; the whole is full, crowded, and the wonder seems to be how so many incidents, so regularly connected, and so clearly explained, can be brought together in so small a compass. At the same time, the hurry of events, and the intricacy of the plot, do not interfere with the unfolding of the characters, or the forcible expression of the passions. Some of the scenes are replete with the truest pathos, which is expressed without exaggeration, or the least appearance of art. Though the feelings of paternal affection, of terror, generosity, &c., are often wrought up to the highest pitch, and described with their full force, so that the reader finds nothing wanting; yet it is in language so easy and natural, that not only might it be uttered by the persons themselves, but they could scarcely use any other.

[Mr. Holcroft's play of *The Road to Ruin*, whatever other objection may be made to it, has this great excellence, that the Author seems to have done in it just what he intended. The design may not be lofty or elegant, but the execution is in general complete. Sophia, the innocent heroine of the piece, is the only exception to

this remark; she is meant to be interesting but is only girlish and insipid. The Widow Warren, her relation and rival, is meant to be disgusting; and in that the author certainly has not failed. Mr. Holcroft has more than once satirised the vices of city manners, and made them to consist in a sordid union of gross ignorance, impudence, selfishness, and upstart purse-proud self-importance. In the present Play, however, he has contrasted these glaring and odious qualities with the more respectable features and domestic virtues of a city life in the person and family of the elder Dornton. This character is an admirable representation of that class of English merchants who to plain manners and an unassuming out side, unite unsophisticated, upright sentiments; who have enlarged their minds with their fortunes; who have made frugality and industry factors for benevolence, and the path of honour the road to wealth; who do not let their generosity get the better of their justice, nor their justice of their generosity; in whom the maxims of the world have not obliterated the dictates of humanity; who have heaped up piles of silver and gold, but not to bury the natural affections under them; whose names stand at the head of their *firm*, and are written in the hearts of the distressed; who are members of the Stock-Exchange, without having ceased to belong to the larger community of mankind. If such examples form the exception to the general rule, (as excellence is in all its kinds), they deserve the more to be held up to admiration and imitation: and in this respect, Old Dornton may be considered as stamping this very lively and interesting Comedy with an additional moral value. Nothing can well surpass, in the expression of natural good feeling, or in happy dramatic effect, some of the scenes between him

and his son, the thoughtless, extravagant, but warm-hearted and noble-minded Harry Dornton. We might point out in particular the very admirable and touching scene between Dornton and his son, in which he returns to bid him "good night"; and that in which the son hears his name struck off from the *firm*, with the most frank good-humoured admission of his own failings, and the same sincere, involuntary declarations of respect and affection to his father. The invention (among the *dramatis personæ*) of the names of Mr. Sulky and Mr. Silky, is not one of the least merits of this Comedy; whose characters are as decidedly opposed as their names are nicely distinguished. The character, however, which has given an almost unprecedented popularity to this play, is that of Goldfinch. This personage is a lucky compound of dulness and vivacity. His whole stock of ideas consists of half a dozen cant terms, as "That's your sort," "Go it, my lad," &c.: and yet it cannot be denied that he gives its soul and spirit to the piece. His volubility of speech and action is the pivot on which everything else turns round with dazzling rapidity. He is a sublimation of animal life and motion, without a particle of understanding or any principle of virtue. We do not hate, nay, we hardly despise him; though it would be difficult to say, judging by the ordinary standard, whether he is most knave or fool. He talks nothing but nonsense—always the same nonsense, and that incessantly, and still we are not tired of him, for he seems never tired of himself or of his own eccentric folly and gross vulgarity. "Pleas'd with himself, who all the world can please." In the hands of the late Mr. Lewis (his original representative), he made the most irresistible caricature possible; and his exclamation "Damn all dancing-masters and their

umbrellas," had a most electrical effect upon the house. In a word, Goldfinch was the forerunner of a race of dramatic heroes, who have turned comedy into a school of dashing impertinence; and *The Road to Ruin*, with all its excellences, led the way to that style of fashionable dialogue, which combines the extreme points of metaphysical sentiments and slang phrases, with a success truly enviable; if not altogether unaccountable.[1]]

Mrs. Holcroft died in the year 1790.

It was in the preceding year that Mr. Holcroft met with the severest blow that fortune had yet inflicted on him, the death of his son. This unhappy event has been sometimes misrepresented by persons unacquainted with the character and feelings of Mr. Holcroft: the best answer to these misrepresentations will be to state the circumstances as they happened, without any other comment.

William Holcroft was his only son, and favourite child, and this very circumstance perhaps led to the catastrophe, which had nearly proved fatal to his father as well as to himself. He had been brought up, if any thing, with too much care and tenderness. The greatest attention had been paid to his education from the very first, not

[1] These remarks are extracted from Lacy's Acting Edition, published after two revivals, Haymarket, 15 Sept., 1840, Drury Lane, 18 Oct., 1843. The notes were culled from Hazlitt's MS. notes in his personal copy—one of the few books belonging to Hazlitt which he did not sell, and which did not disappear (cf. W. C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, 1867, 2: 272).

only by teaching him to read and write, French, English, &c., but by daily instilling such moral principles into his mind, as it was Mr. Holcroft's earnest wish, and firm belief, would in the end make him a great and good man. Perhaps it was a mistake to suppose that precept could anticipate the fruits of experience, or that it was not a dangerous experiment to enable a child to think and reason for himself on the propriety of his own actions, before settled habits and a knowledge of consequences had provided a sufficient counterpoise to the levity of youth, and the caprices of fancy. Be this as it may, he was a boy of extraordinary capacity, and Mr. Holcroft thought no pains should be spared for his instruction and improvement. From the first, however, he had shewn an unsettled disposition, and his propensity to ramble was such from his childhood, that when he was only four years old, and under the care of an aunt at Nottingham, he wandered away to a place at some distance, where there was a coffee-house, into which he went, and read the newspapers to the company, by whom he was taken care of, and sent home.[1] This propensity was so strong in him, that it became habitual, and he had run away six or seven times before the last. Once, for instance, in 1786, when he was about thirteen, he had taken a little mare which belonged to his father, and went to Northampton,

[1] A similar incident is related of the fictitious character of Hugh Trevor, and the reader is reminded of Holcroft's own early readings from the Bible.

where he was discovered by some respectable persons in the place, and word being sent to Mr. Holcroft, he went down, and brought him home with him. On Sunday, November 8th, 1789, he brought his father a short poem; a watch which had been promised as a reward, was given him; his father conversed with him in the most affectionate manner, praised, encouraged, and told him, that notwithstanding his former errors and wanderings, he was convinced he would become a good and excellent man. But he observed, when taking him by the hand to express his kindness, that the hand of the youth, instead of returning the pressure as usual, remained cold and insensible. This however at the moment was supposed to be accidental. He seemed unembarrassed, cheerful, and asked leave, without any appearance of design or hesitation, to dine with a friend in the city, which was immediately granted. He thanked his father, went down stairs, and several times anxiously inquired whether his father were gone to dress. As soon as he was told that he had left his room, he went up stairs again, broke open a drawer, and took out forty pounds. With this, the watch, a pocket-book, and a pair of pistols of his father's, he hastened away to join one of his acquaintance, who was going to the West-Indies. The name of this young person was G——. He was immediately pursued to Gravesend, but ineffectually. It was not discovered till the following Wednesday, that he had taken the money. After several days of the most

cautious. For my own part, Sir, small as my consequence is in this world, nothing but a thorough conviction of the goodness of a man's heart, could make me accept him for my friend. I am convinced you think in this like me, and I esteem your friendship, Sir, and the friendship of men like you too highly ever to wilfully make myself unworthy of it. Men who feel the dignity of virtue are too proud to be vicious. Excuse this, Sir, I only mean to assure you I will endeavour to equal the good opinion you are pleased to entertain of me, and not to write my own eulogy.]

[*To Mr. Professor Dugald Stewart*

DEAR SIR,

I am ashamed of myself, I have treated you with seeming disrespect, by neglecting to answer your letter. This is a thing I should be ashamed of with any person, and especially with one who I believe deserves the best esteem of the best men. Hear what I can urge in mitigation, and I hope to obtain your pardon. Your letter arrived just at the moment when my opera of the Noble Peasant was in rehearsal; and I exceedingly hurried and teazed, not only with attending every day at the theatre, but with alterations, writing new songs, new scenes, making retrenchments, &c. &c. to suit the circumstances of introducing this performer, leaving out that, and so on; by which you will readily conjecture I was not idle: add to which the necessity of supplying printers with copy of Les Veillees du Chateau, which I am translating. I even began this letter yesterday, but was cut short at the word *teazed* in the last paragraph, *par un impertinent*, and was obliged to defer the subject till this morning. My defence is ended in which I even plead guilty, but hope you will find lenity not ill-bestowed. Mr. de Bonne-

ville has been several months at Evreux. I wrote letter after letter, and received no answer, till at last I grew very seriously uneasy. My letters lay at Paris for him; he is returned, has written, and I am recovered of my fears. I believe, Sir, you know how deeply I am interested in whatever concerns Monsieur de Bonneville. At present, or rather at the moment he wrote, he was severely afflicted with the tooth-ache; but this, though a terrible *evil* while it *lasts*, is not I hope a *lasting evil*. I shall transcribe your kind expressions concerning him in my next, for which give me leave to thank you: I assure you they gave me pleasure, yes, Sir, great pleasure. My delay has had one good effect; had I written sooner I could not have told you where he was, or if any where. I received his letter on Thursday last, shall write in a few days, and would advise you, Sir, to do likewise: your letter will be sure to reach him if you direct to him, "Chez Monsieur Barrois le jeune Libraire Rue Hurepaix à Paris." You are kind enough to say, Sir, you will call on me when you come to London. I have a house and table, Sir; and such as they are, if you will do me the honor of making them your own, while you stay, be it short or long, I shall remember the favor: this is said in plain and simple sincerity, and not in compliment. If you should see Mr. Robertson, junior, pray present my kind respects.

I am, &c.

T. H.]

[*To the Hon. Horace Walpole*

SIR,

The politeness with which I was received on my accidental visit to Strawberry-hill, in company with Mr. Mercier, and the pleasure I felt not only in viewing so rare a collection of the works of art, but in the very kind

manner in which they were shewn, will not easily be forgotten. As a small testimony of the truth of this, I then projected, and having received them from the binders, now take the liberty to send you copies of such dramatic works of mine, as have been already played and published, which I beg you to accept, not as a task imposed upon you to read them, nor yet with an expectation of praise, but as an acknowledgement of as much thankfulness as I dare express. I have also inclosed a copy of a manuscript comedy, for which I can give no better reason, than that though every motive of delicacy would make me avoid laying you under the least restraint, yet it may happen that an hour's amusement, which is the best return for the attention with which you were pleased to treat me, and the invitation you gave me to revisit Strawberry-hill in a more favourable season.

I am, Sir,
Your very respectful,
Humble servant,
T. H.]

[ANSWER

To Mr. Holcroft

BERKLEY SQUARE, *Nov.* 28*th*, 1788.

The civilities, Sir, which you are pleased to say you received from me at Strawberry-hill, were no more than were due to any gentleman, and certainly did not deserve such acknowledgement as you have made; and I should be ashamed of your thanking me so much, if the agreeable manner in which you have greatly overpaid them by the present of your works, did not make me easily swallow my shame, though it will not dispense me from assuring you how much I am obliged to you. I shall read them

with pleasure as soon as I am settled in town. Just at present, I live between town and country, and should not have leisure but to read them by snatches. It is for this reason, that if you are not in haste for it, I shall beg leave to keep your manuscript comedy, till I can peruse it with proper attention. If you should want it soon, I will return it, and ask for it again, for it would be unjust to the merit of your works to run through them too rapidly.

I am, Sir,
Your obliged, and
Obedient humble servant,
H. Walpole.]

[*From Mr. Shield,*

Turin, *September* 22*d*, 1791.

Dear Holcroft,

. . . My health, since I left England, one day excepted, has been extremely good ; but passing the Alps in the manner I did, was too much for me. I thought it degraded the race of men too much to suffer two of them to carry me in a sedan over this immense mountain : in consequence of which we had mules ; and after riding about one mile, reflection told me that I was shortening the life of an animal, by obliging it to carry me up and down so many precipices ; and as I saw women walk it, I was resolved to do the same, for I was then in possession of the temper of the animal which I led, and would not yield to the intreaties of my fellow travellers to remount. I was so much exhausted when I arrived at Laneburg, that I threw myself upon the bed : soon after which, dinner was served up in the same room ; but my appetite had entirely left me through fatigue : my heart was good, but my strength failed me. However, after

waiting for two hours for some very indifferent tea, it revived me a little, and I got into the coach, and was entirely recovered by the time we reached Turin. A man needs no common share of that inestimable quality which you so eminently possess (fortitude) to travel through the South of France and Savoy, with only a dozen words of the language. I thought change of scene would prove the best medicine for me, and I seem to have been right in my prognostications, for I find myself in the full possession of my faculties, and am determined to exert myself in my profession. A very accomplished Russian is my chief companion. But the greatest original of our voiture party is a Chinese, of a small stature, but of a capacious memory: he speaks the French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Russian, and Latin languages, so as to astonish the natives and students of the above. His character is so uncommon that, were you to draw him for the English stage, he must reside in London before the audience would acknowledge your character to be natural: most people like him, for the only indignity he has yet met with is his being taken for my valet, from his attention to me.

Your's truly,

WM. SHIELD.

P.S.—I cannot view the beautiful scenes which at present surround me, without recollecting the strokes of Milton's pencil in his sublime picture of Paradise Lost.]

[*To Mr. Shield*

LONDON, *Oct.* 11, 1791.

DEAR SHIELD,

You cannot easily imagine the pleasure which your letter gave me. The passions, hopes, and alarms of the

heart are necessarily excited in behalf of those for whom it has an affection by distance, and by its ignorance of the good or ill health, happiness or misfortune of those it loves. I heard of you at Lyons, and for the moment was satisfied. I knew from the numbers who cross the Alps, that there would be little or no danger in traversing the tremendous Mount Cenis; yet I was anxiously desirous to hear you had passed it in safety. I have accompanied you in imagination, and looked down from its summit on the surrounding nations. Fancy supposes that, being placed there, the eye has a survey, as it were, of all Europe, though in reality its powers are too feeble to see distinctly and accurately at a few yards' distance; but fancy delights in these deceptions, nor can the scenery be other than sublime and astonishing. You are at present in what, perhaps, more than any other, may properly be called the country of contradictions. The noble works of art, of sculpture, of painting, and the monuments of architecture, which are to be met with in almost every city of Italy, form a surprising contrast to the ignorance, poverty, sloth, and present depravity of its inhabitants. Men who, by the baneful influence of priesthood and bad government, have, from the first of mankind, become almost the lowest. Sunk in ignorance, deprived of energy, destitute of all noble emulation, we ask with amazement, how could a people like this produce works so magnificent; or tower, as they have done, above the rest of mankind? You are sensible, dear Shield, I now speak of them as a nation; there are, no doubt, individuals among them who still possess those powers, and that genius, of which the herd of their fellow citizens is deprived. They only wait a more happy moment, and a return of times more fortunate, to become all that they

have been, and I hope much more. I need not tell you the infinite pleasure it would give me, could I, at this moment, transport myself to the palace in which you lodge, for such no doubt it is, and accompany you in all your peregrinations: I have a very earnest desire to see Rome, that queen of cities, and take a view of all her treasures, which as I am told, are so immense and multifarious, as presently to satiate the most inquisitive mind.

Do not forget, dear Shield, to fix your attention on the various works of Michael Angelo: in painting, sculpture, and architecture, I am persuaded he was the first of modern artists. Nor must Raphael escape your notice. Rome, I am told, is the only place on earth to view his pictures, for all the best of them are there. I shall ask you a thousand questions concerning them on your return, and of the effect they produced upon you. The remains of ancient architecture: the Pantheon, Trajan's Pillar, the Tower of St. Angelo, &c. &c. you will certainly not forget. I should indeed prefer fixing my attention on a select few of the grandest objects, to that of dividing it into too many parts, and thus rendering it without efficacy. No passage in your letter gave me so much pleasure as that in which you tell me you are in full possession of your faculties, *which you are determined to exert.*—The determination is well worthy of a mind like your's, Shield, which to possess, and not to employ, is, in my opinion, the true sin against the Holy Ghost; it is unpardonable. Familiarized as your mind at present is to harmony, and stored with musical ideas, what can be so desirable for the world, or so delightful to yourself, as to arrange those stores, to pour them forth, and to dig the gold from the mountain where, while it lies buried, it is worthless. Not that any accusation of the kind can be brought against

you, yet, Shield, distance will authorize friendship in speaking a truth which false modesty unjustly forbids us to repeat *viva voce*. Your works are already an honour to your nation and your art; and had you not been under the malignant influence of absurd prejudices, they would have been infinitely more honourable. We are at present all, more or less, under similar influences, and obliged to obey the dictates of necessity. I hope, however, that you will be less so in future than heretofore: and the end of my present very severe labours is to free myself from them if possible. There needed not any caution relative to the newspapers; I believe you are too generally beloved to be in danger of attack; but should illiberality or envy shew their fangs, be certain, you will not want a defender. Forgive me, dear Shield, for not transcribing this letter myself; my brain is exceedingly busy, and not a little fatigued; you will see on what, when you return to England. I am obliged to employ every moment in that severe labour which is requisite to form a consistent, efficacious, and excellent whole; whether the work I am writing will be such must be left to the proof, but such at least I must endeavour to make it, and I hope my efforts will not be unsuccessful. All good, all happiness, all pleasure, be with you wherever you go. T. H.]

[*To Mr. Godwin*

July 20*th*, 1797.

It was my intention to write, for I feel a kind of vacuity of heart, when I am deprived of the intercourse of my accustomed friends; but as I cannot write to them all, and as we have many friends in common, I think there are few whom you may not safely assure on my part, that they have their turn in my thoughts. I deferred this

pleasant duty, however, till I had seen your mother, whom I thought it right and respectful to visit. My coming occasioned some little alarm ; the Major, Mrs. Harwood, and Fanny, accompanied me ; we were seen from the windows as we came up to the gate. I had my spectacles on, and your sister-in-law ran to inform your mother that yourself and Mrs. Godwin were arrived. The old lady stood in the portico ; the young ones advanced ; there was an anxious curiosity in their countenances, and your sister said, addressing herself to me, " I think I know you, Sir." I scarcely knew what to reply : imagination had winged her and myself up to London, where I supposed, some years ago, I might have seen her at your lodgings ; taking it for granted that she was a relation : but as I did not answer, Major Harwood relieved our embarrassment by announcing my name. The change of countenance, perhaps, could not have fully persuaded her that my face was actually yours, yet she seemed rather to trust to her hopes, than to her recollection ; and these being disappointed, an immediate blank took possession of her features, and the rising joy was damped. Your mother, however, very kindly invited us in, and gave us all the good things she had, that could administer to our immediate pleasures. The expectations which Major Harwood had raised by his description of your mother were not entirely answered. She was neither so alert, so commanding, nor so animated, as he and Ann had described. I think her very rapidly on the decline : having quitted her farming business I have no doubt myself but that her faculties will be impaired much faster than they would have been had she continued to exert them. Her memory is good, her conceptions, speaking comparatively, are clear, and her strength considerable. I have seen more

of the county of Norfolk, than of its inhabitants; of which county I remark, that, to the best of my recollection, it contains more churches, more flints, more turkeys, more turnips, more wheat, more cultivation, more commons, more cross-roads, and from that token probably more inhabitants, than any county I ever visited. It has another distinguishing and paradoxical feature, if what I hear be true: It is said to be more illiterate than any other parts of England, and yet I doubt if any county of like extent have produced an equal number of famous men. This is, however, merely a conjecture made, not from examination, but from memory. As it is necessary for me to bathe, I shall immediately depart for Yarmouth, and pass through Norwich, which I have not yet seen. If you, or Mrs. Godwin, or both, can but prevail in yourself or selves to endure the fatigue of writing to me, hope I need not use many words to convince you of the pleasure it will give me: and be it understood that this letter is addressed to you both, whatever the direction on the back may affirm to the contrary. Professions are almost impertinent, and yet I am almost tempted to profess to you how sincerely and seriously I am interested in your happiness, but as I am sure my words would ill describe my thoughts, I shall forbear Pray inform me, sweet lady, in what state is your novel? And on what, courteous Sir, are *you* employed? Though I am idle myself, I cannot endure that any body else should be so. Direct to me at the Post-Office, Yarmouth.]

[*To Fulke Greville, Esq.*

Dear Sir,

When I returned from Blackheath, I found your kind note, in which you speak in that mild and true spirit

of philosophy, which is worthy of a liberal and philosophic mind. Proof respecting the subject in question (*Instinct*) is not to be had. To me the actions of all animals the consequence of reflection, than to suppose them *blind* impulse. I care not a farthing whether my opinion be right or wrong ; but while it *is* my opinion, however weak or absurd it may be, I will never pretend to a conviction I do not feel : and in this I am sure to meet your approbation, because a contrary conduct would be contemptible. A hen that has chickens, rakes up a barley-corn on a dunghill and stands clucking over it till her brood come round her. I could as soon suppose this an action of instinct, viz. an action without an intention, for that is what I understand by the word instinct ; I repeat, I could as soon suppose the hen acted from instinct, and without any idea passing in her mind, as I could at seeing a tomtit carry moss into the hollow of a tree, for the safety of itself and young : the action is much more complicated in the one case, than in the other, but I do not see that it warrants me to conclude the tomtit is acting without any intention. My mind revolts at the idea of a bird selecting a hole just capacious enough to creep into, remarking in what tree that hole happens to be, flying away and looking round for materials to make its nest, placing those materials in a certain form, leaving its mate to watch, and give notice if an enemy approach, and going through a rational and well connected system, without rationality, and without meaning. It seems to me much less difficult to suppose the bird has a greater capacity than I am habituated to attribute to birds, or that it learns to do these things from seeing others of the same species with which it lives in society do the like. Pray, Sir, do me the justice to believe, that I mean to give all

this as mere opinion, and that I am superior to dogmatizing. The fact you mention of the squirrel, may, as you say, Sir, if I am not mistaken, afford deductions for either side of the question. The first thing I should wish to inquire into would be, whether the squirrel had never been in company with other squirrels that had the like habits; and, if that were proved against me, I should next inquire, whether a young squirrel that had never been in company with any other squirrel did, the very first time it had nuts given it, go and seek for a corner to hide them, and if even this extraordinary thing were to happen, I should still be much more inclined to attribute it to the fears and cunning of the animal, than to suppose it went and came and knew nothing about the matter; for so, I think, acting from instinct, or without intention, implies. Your Wilbury horses, Sir, are surely on my side of the question, and my very good friends on this occasion, or I am once more egregiously deceived. They not only *choose* to leave the heat and retire to the shade, but they moreover select that part of the shade which suits them best, that is, where they are least annoyed by flies. Just so an over-roasted cook-maid retires behind her fire-screen, and if she happens to sit down on an uneasy chair removes to another, and gives the easiest the preference. Men play on the harpsichord and talk, as men walk and talk; i.e. the thing is so familiar, it employs only a part of their attention; but give them music which is too difficult for them, that is, which employs their whole attention, and I from experience will answer for their silence. The respect due to your friendly mode of arguing, has occasioned me to do what I have a great aversion to, write a long letter. But however convinced you may be of the fallacy of my argu-

ments, I hope I shall never give you cause to suspect the sincerity and friendship with which I am, and shall ever remain,

Your very respectful,
Humble servant,
T. H.

P.S.—I have sent you the magazine, and a volume of the Harleian manuscript, a very scarce, curious, and dear book, and hope it may afford something that will entertain. I have not got the other book: *Lord Kaimes's Sketches of Man* is the title.]

[*To Mr. Holcroft, sen.*

Aug. 31*st*, 1791.

My Dear Father,

I have received both your kind letters, and hope you will excuse my not having answered you sooner, my delay having been occasioned by the intense application which I am obliged to pay to a work I am now writing. I imagine it will be printed about Christmas, and you shall receive an early copy. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to hear of your good health. I am convinced of the efficacy of sea-bathing, and am glad you are near enough to the sea to enjoy the benefit of it. Remember, my dear father, what I repeated to you, when I had last the happiness of your company. Keep your mind alive; exercise every part of your body, fingers, joints, and muscles; endeavour to infuse spirit and vigour into them, and depend upon it you will be surprised at the effects which will be produced. We die piece-meal, by falling into habits of apathy and neglect; and by supposing that debility and inactivity are the inevitable consequences of age. The mind becomes weary of action;

it loses its desires, and the body sinks into listlessness, palsy, and universal decay. This I am persuaded is the error of a false supposition, that death is inevitable. Not that I would have you understand I myself think I shall not die: but I very sincerely think, when I do die, it will be of ignorance, and of the disease I have just mentioned; accidents excepted.

You inquire, dear Sir, whether I am married again. I cannot say what miracles may happen in the world; but I really think I have had marriage enough for one man. The woman whom I could truly esteem is not easily to be found; and, if the discovery were made, it would be strange if she were wholly disengaged. Your grandchildren are all in good health, and inquire after you very affectionately. Mrs. Colles and family are well, she dined with us the Sunday before last. With respect to affairs, I am sorry for your sake, my dear father, that I am not so rich as I could wish. The only remedy is strict economy, and hard labour; both of which conditions I am obliged severely to comply with: but, far from being discontented; to be able to comply with them, to be rid of the false notions that fix felicity in the enjoyment of superfluous trifles, which none of us want, and to have a mind industrious, active, and delighting to produce, these things are to me happiness, which may be almost called supreme. I shall for some months be exceedingly short of money; but you shall nevertheless hear from me, at the usual time. Pray remember me kindly to Mrs. Holcroft, and assure yourself that I shall always remain

Your dutiful and
Affectionate Son,
T. H.]